THE FUTURE OF INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

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EDGE

DREAMCAST ■ PLAYSTATION ■ NINTENDO 64 ■ PC ■ ARCADE ■ ONLINE

QUAKE III: ARENA

HOW DID ID CREATE A MONSTER?

DREAMCAST STORMS E3

REVEALED: THE HOTTEST TITLES AT LA

MADE IN HONG KONG

EXPOSED: THE PIRATE'S PARADISE

PREVIEWED: METAL GEAR INTEGRAL • DYNAMITE COP 2
ONIMUSHA • KOUDELKA • SOUL FIGHTER • RED DOG
REVIEWED: THE PHANTOM MENACE • EPISODE ONE RACER
OMEGA BOOST • SOUL REAVER • HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS




NEXT
TETRIS
NEXT
03
LINES
LEFT
HIGH SCORE
10000
ROUND 1
CREDITS 9
SCORE 133
LINES 0
SCORE 131
LINES 0



Some software releases transcend the mere term 'videogame', existing rather as institutions, cults, phenomena.

Such titles deliver more than gameplay to their legions of obsessive followers. They're more about *experience*.

At the head of this elite table sits the *Quake* series, which changed the way we perceived videogaming upon its inception three short years ago.

Consciously or not, *Quake* author Jon Carmack built a monster in 1996. Its arrival not only had a life-changing impact on the game-buying public but the development community, too: if codeshops aren't using their LANs for after-hours *Quake* sessions, they're sifting through id's code in order to build games such as the sub-genre-defining *Half-Life* or the controversy-courting *Kingpin*.

Quake's towering new form has recently been publicly aired via a test version of *Quake III: Arena*, so it seemed pertinent to visit id's offices in Dallas this month and attempt to get inside the heads of the most important coders, designers and artists working in PC games today (see p44).

Elsewhere in the States, the 1999 Electronics Entertainment Expo has played host to one of the most heated episodes in the running battles between Sega, Sony and Nintendo. This month's news section covers the manoeuvres and counter-manoeuvres that provided the event's highlights, while an extensive E3 report begins on p52.

Returning to the UK, putting this issue together wasn't the smoothest of rides. Could the existence of that blessed *Quake III: Arena* test have been one of the reasons behind this? No. Surely not. That can't be possible. It's only a videogame. Isn't it?

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Cutting Edge

The latest news from the world of interactive entertainment

SEGA AFFIRMS INTERNET STRATEGY AS BT COMMITS

Brit telecommunications giant helps clear up uncertainty regarding Dreamcast's online potential





Following **Edge**'s exclusive revelation last month, Sega Europe has officially confirmed that its Dreamcast console will be delivered bundled with a modem – despite not committing to it being a 56K model – when it launches on September 23.

More crucially, however, the company has established deals with telecomms giant British Telecom and information technology services company ICL.

BT will be handling the coordination of the European Dreamcast network, covering areas such as dial-up, Internet access and billing services. By the console's nature, getting online has to be as hassle-free as possible, and with this in mind no access fee will be necessary. Dreamcast users accessing the Internet will be charged at local-call rate.

ICL, meanwhile, is currently designing and building online Dreamcast services, which will initially include email and Internet browsing and be followed by online gaming and shopping facilities.

Having BT and ICL on board is a major coup for Sega Europe. The entire connectivity issue was, until only recently, still the topic of much consternation to potential purchasers in the UK, and the company's initiatives will allay fears that its long history of bungled launches may not be about to be perpetuated.

Apart from *Sega Rally 2* and a number of smaller-scale online-capable games in development, however, there is little at present to suggest that Dreamcast owners will spend more time playing networked titles than they will traditional software. Having delivered a 'we're serious about this' message, though, Sega Europe is in a strong position to lure support from online gaming's biggest developers – if not until well into next year.

There is little at present to suggest that Dreamcast owners will spend more time playing networked titles than they will traditional software



Although it will not launch with the Dreamcast, *Sega Rally 2* will be the first title to test the multiplayer infrastructure that has BT's full support

Launch title confusion

Sega still refuses to be drawn on the ten titles that will accompany the machine at launch, but it has released details of the 31 games that will reach UK shop shelves before December 25. Historically speaking, the line-up is perhaps the strongest ever witnessed for the point of launch and initial period following any console's release in Europe. With star titles such as *Power Stone*, *Soul Calibur*, *Virtua Fighter 3tb* and *Trick Style* among the machine's early battery of games, Dreamcast will clearly be capable of providing the type of cerebral-lite, thrill-heavy gameplay that has made videogaming one of the most popular forms of mainstream entertainment in the '90s. Looking beyond arcade-style entertainment, it's a rather different story, with few titles offering strategic leanings. Given the nature of such an action-heavy catalogue, then, it may be no surprise to see Sega returning to the kind of visceral marketing tactics that worked so effectively during the Mega Drive's heyday. The company certainly cannot afford to be anything less than ebullient.

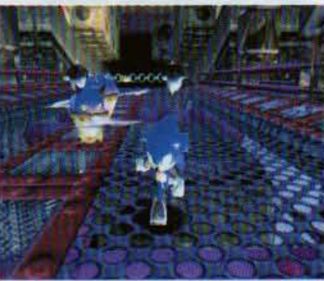
Drop in Japan

Sega of Japan, meanwhile, is about to drop the Dreamcast's price from ¥29,800 (approx. £150) to ¥19,900 (approx. £100). The company claims to be pleased with a sell-through total of one million at retail to date, but is eager to make the machine a bigger success than the Mega Drive was in its home territory. It has also been suggested that Sega's proposed new pricepoint neatly brings it in line with the £199 and $199 tags in the UK and US.

In other news from Sega of Japan, it transpires that the company is working on software for both Nintendo's Game Boy and Bandai's WonderSwan. Some pundits have expressed shock at this revelation, but in reality it is merely the action of a company looking to explore new revenue avenues.








Nine of Sega's biggest DC titles for 1999, clockwise from top left: *Cool Boarders DC, The House of the Dead 2, Metropolis Street Racer, Power Stone, Red Dog, Sonic Adventure, Soul Calibur, Trick Style*, and *Virtua Fighter 3tb*

1999 DC TITLES

Sega has confirmed the following 31 titles for release in Europe between September 23 and December 25:

Airforce Delta	Konami
Blue Stinger	Sega
Cool Boarders DC	Sega
Jimmy White's Cueball 2	Virgin
Expendable	Infogrames
F1 World C'ship	Video System
The House of the Dead 2	Sega
Hydro Thunder	Midway
Marvel Vs Capcom	Capcom
Monaco GP RS 2	UbiSoft
Mortal Kombat Gold	Midway
Metropolis Street Racer	Sega
NBA 2000	Sega
Power Stone	Capcom
NFL QB Club 2000	Acclaim
Rayman 2	UbiSoft
Ready 2 Rumble	Midway
Red Dog	Sega
Redline Racer	UbiSoft
Sega Rally 2	Sega
Sega Soccer	Sega
Sonic Adventure	Sega
Soul Calibur	Namco
Speed Devils	UbiSoft
Supreme Snowb'ding	I'grames
Toy Commander	Sega
Trick Style	Acclaim
UEFA Striker	Infogrames
Virtua Fighter 3tb	Sega
Wild Metal C'ntry	Infogrames

FIRST NEXT GEN SONY TITLE ARRIVES **AT STATION**

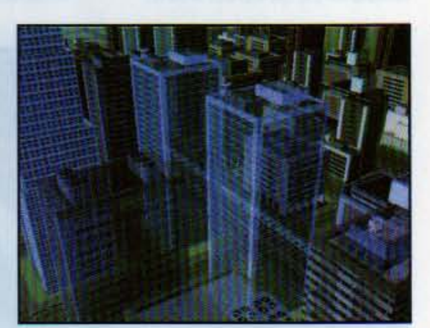
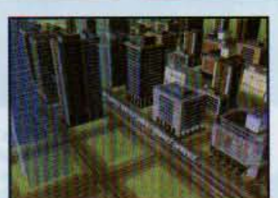
Staunch Japanese Sony supporter reveals software for 128bit superconsole – to scant acclaim

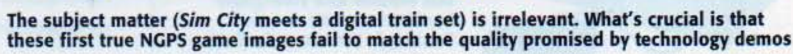
Having long demonstrated an unflagging commitment to Sony, Japanese publisher Artdink has released the first images from what is set to be one of the first next-generation PlayStation releases in Japan.

Artdink delivered *AIV*, a run-of-the-mill *Sim City*-with-trains title, very shortly after the original PlayStation debuted in Japan, and the company is preparing *A6*, a sequel, which will closely follow the release of Sony's next machine.

Edge has yet to see *A6* in action, but cannot help expressing no small amount of disappointment at the quality of these early shots. The polygon count certainly wouldn't frighten a top-end PC, while the draw distance is nothing to shout about.

Following Sony's showing at E3 – during which it presented a rough, surprisingly ineffectual realtime version of one of the glorious prerendered sequences from Konami's *Silent Hill* – Sony might well regret allowing Artdink to issue imagery of this nature, especially with Nintendo breathing down its neck (see p8) and Sega finally beginning to shape up.



The subject matter (*Sim City* meets a digital train set) is irrelevant. What's crucial is that these first true NGPS game images fail to match the quality promised by technology demos

NINTENDO PARTNERS UP FOR **DOLPHIN DREAM**

Japanese tech giant Matsushita and US computing legend IBM to co-engineer new Nintendo console

Nintendo chose E3 as the platform upon which to firm up some of the specs for its next generation console, currently dubbed Dolphin, which it ambitiously claims it will launch on a simultaneous worldwide basis in late 2000.

As exclusively revealed in **E**71, the machine will use DVD as its primary storage medium. Delivered by its new-found partner, Panasonic parent company Matsushita, following the formation of a deal worth $1bn, the custom DVD format is being designed with anti-piracy measures – or 'enhanced counterfeit protection', as Nintendo terms it – as a primary concern. Having cited CD piracy worries as one of its reasons for continuing with a silicon-based software medium with the N64 and then seeing all manner of effective CD-based piracy devices flood the marketplace, this was a move Nintendo was forced to make.

(As part of the potentially revolutionary deal, Matsushita is in a position to use the Dolphin technology in its own-branded DVD systems in the future, which would be a major step forward for the set-top box dream.)

Nintendo's other partner for its Dolphin format is IBM, which is providing the CPU, currently known as Gekko. The processor, a development of the PowerPC architecture commonly used in Apple Macintosh computer systems, has a clock speed of 400MHz and uses 0.18-micron copper chip technology. While Sony and Toshiba have proposed mass production of 0.18-micron chips for the next-generation PlayStation, at E3's Dolphin briefing, held just prior to the show, Nintendo of America company chairman **Howard Lincoln** gleefully goaded his rivals, reminding delegates that "Toshiba has never mass produced" such units, and that "IBM already makes 0.18-micron chips."

Element of surprise

Crucially, Nintendo was not willing to show any Dolphin technology demos. Demos are in existence, of course, but IBM's **John Kelly** clearly marked out Nintendo's pre-release publicity strategy during E3, saying: "We're going to continue to be very circumspect in revealing all of Dolphin's specs for a very simple reason – there are more technological surprises to come, and we'd like to keep them just that – surprises – for you, and especially for our competitors."

Kelly is charged, in part, with getting the Nintendo hype machine rolling once more at a time when the Japanese company is clearly not happy to be showing even part of its hand: Lincoln had opened his address with, "While Nintendo's focus clearly remains fixed on the N64, we happen to believe it has many more years of profitable life," in a clear effort to ensure attention was not deflected from what it would be presenting on the showfloor of E3.

> "We're going to be very circumspect in revealing all of Dolphin's specs for a very simple reason – there are more technological surprises to come, and we'd like to keep them just that" John Kelly, IBM

Sony and Nintendo are currently engaged in a game of corporate chess. Following the furore which surrounded the next-generation PlayStation's unveiling in Japan, it was inevitable that Nintendo would elect to use a high-profile event such as E3 to preach its status as the world's leading videogame company to an audience which has, in recent years, been convincingly romanced by Sony. "We are absolutely confident that Dolphin's graphics will equal or exceed anything our friends at Sony can come up with for PlayStation 2," said Lincoln, echoing the statements of **Edge**'s Nintendo insider quoted in issue 71. With Sony's E3 technology demos lacking some of the allure they originally had in Japan, delegates believed Lincoln's words.

With partners like Matsushita (the world's largest consumer electronics manufacturer) and IBM, who'd bet against Nintendo now?





Matsushita Electronics' president Yoichi Morishita seals his deal with Nintendo chief Hiroshi Yamauchi. Matsushita's last venture into videogame hardware was its doomed Panasonic 3DO console (left)

NOA president Howard Lincoln: "We need to power Dolphin with a CPU that's second to none"

DOLPHIN SPECS

With Nintendo revealing only enough to steal the thunder from Sony's forthcoming console, exact Dolphin specs are non-existent. To date, the only concrete details regarding the format are below. (If you're wondering about the codename of the project, incidentally, it came about simply because the designer of the system's graphical coprocessor likes dolphins.)

CPU
IBM Gekko (PowerPC based) running at 400MHz

Graphics
Custom ArtX-designed 200MHz chip

Memory
Unspecified DRAM capacity
3.2Gb/sec transfer

Storage medium
Matsushita-designed proprietary DVD

E3 1999: HIGH ON SHOW, **LOWER ON GO**

Sega enjoys sunshine in LA during world's biggest ever videogame show







This year's E3 was, as expected, enormous. So enormous, in fact, that some attendees had difficulty even finding Sony's guarded next-generation PlayStation demo pyramid. They only needed to look for the heaving, baying crowds

The biggest ever Electronics Entertainment Expo ended on May 15, having seen over 55,000 visitors pass through its doors – a 33 per cent increase over last year's attendance.

Those in search of evidence of Sony's next-generation PlayStation were not disappointed: they found what they were looking for in the hall containing the big three console manufacturers (Sony bagging the central area), where a spangly pyramid, each side housing a monitor, continually ran the demos first seen by invite only in Tokyo in March.

There were no enormous banners or fanfares proclaiming the existence of the demo pyramid, and, truth be told, the area had a slight whiff of 'Blue Peter' production values about it. Could it be that Sony had got word of Nintendo's proposed announcement just prior to the show and lashed something together in an effort to retain its impetus? Whatever the case, the unit was continually scrutinised by visitors – most eager to chance their arm on the *GT* demo.

Sega did not have the giant inflatables of Sony nor the 'Phantom Menace'-themed area of Nintendo, so it let its Dreamcast games speak for themselves – something they were more capable of doing, ensuring that many about-turn manoeuvres were made by those who'd already written Sega off.

Sega did not have the giant inflatables of Sony nor the 'Phantom Menace'-themed area of Nintendo, so it let its games speak for themselves

Nintendo's showing was solid. The PC scene was typically messy. Overall, 1999's E3 was a disappointment. Read the full report starting on p52.













Six of the best from E3 (clockwise from top left): Polyphony's *GT2* (PlayStation), Capcom's *Dino Crisis* and *Resident Evil: Nemesis* (PlayStation), Rare's *Perfect Dark* (N64), Namco's *Soul Calibur* (DC), and Infogrames' *Rally Masters* (PC)

SEGA WHEELS OUT FERRARI **POWER**

Yu Suzuki's ambitious racing game takes centre stage at private show







***Ferrari F355*'s three-screen setup results in what looks to be the most accurate replication of real racing ever seen in the arcade**

Of the new coin-ops on display, *Ferrari F355 Challenge* was undoubtedly the most impressive at the most recent Sega Private Show, held on May 5 in Kamata (near the firm's Japanese headquarters). As with all previous unveilings of his productions, Yu Suzuki attended the event, but the presence of Sega president Shoichiro Irimajiri served to further underline the importance of this innovative three-screen coin-op.

Powered by three Naomi boards, the emphasis is very much on realism. *Ferrari F355* is more of a racing sim than a traditional arcade experience, which partly explains Sega's willingness to seek technical input from Ferrari itself. The five circuits the game offers are recreations of real race tracks and relate a stunning level of detail, with spectators appearing as actual 3D models rather than the usual banks of flat 2D textures. Audio is equally authentic, the speakers surrounding the player bellowing forth the notorious howl of a race-tuned Ferrari engine.

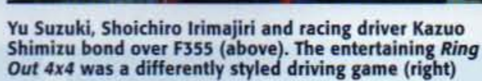
Several difficulty levels ensure accessibility and a printout detailing racing line, time taken, engine RPM values and gear changes can be collected from the side of the cabinet after each session.

Edge will be talking to Yu Suzuki about *F355* next month.








Yu Suzuki, Shoichiro Irimajiri and racing driver Kazuo Shimizu bond over F355 (above). The entertaining *Ring Out 4x4* was a differently styled driving game (right)



CUTTINGS

Thresh thrashed

One of the highlights of the Professional Gaming League's championship was the continuing *Pong* war between Nolan 'Atari' Bushnell and Dennis 'Thresh' Fong. The score currently stands at 1-1 with Bushnell reversing last year's loss with an emphatic 15-5 victory.

Lincoln slows down

Although Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi is expected to step down soon, Nintendo of America president Howard Lincoln has confirmed that he is retiring in February. He will remain on the board of directors, however.

ADVERTISING NEW TARGET IN GAME **STORM**

US concern shifts from the content of games to the effect of violent ad images

Fallout from the Littleton school shootings has been, so far at least, muted. The most concrete response has been the passing of senator Joe Lieberman's bill to investigate the marketing of violent media with regard to children. Lieberman claims that companies are using similar tactics to those encouraging kids to smoke.

Fearful of a backlash, exhibitors at E3 were careful not to court controversy. Sega's *House of the Dead 2* was not equipped with lightguns, and Nintendo pulled video footage of *Perfect Dark*. "Because of Project Dolphin, we had to bump something," explained a spokesperson. "But we also pulled it out of respect for what's been going on."

In another development, retired Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman apologised to Nintendo for suggesting that it had designed games for military training purposes. Grossman is a witness in the Paducah shooting case in which various media companies including 18 games firms are being sued for $100m.



Concern is growing over the effect of adverts for games such as *Kingpin*

ATI BOXES CLEVER AS NETWORKS RAMP UP

High-end games signify the beginning of the much-heralded set-top box revolution

Set-top boxes took a step closer to mainstream gaming with the announcement that Criterion's superbiking game *Redline Racer* is now available for ATI's Set-Top Wonder II reference technology.

Compared to current set-top boxes, which are only equivalent to a P100 PC, the Wonder II is a generational leap, mirroring the capabilities of a 350MHz PII with a 3D graphics card.

"The reason we decided to use *Redline Racer* was that it's a successful game and we could get it working in the timescale," explained **Mike King**, Criterion's marketing director. "We are treating the set-top box as a great potential platform for games." Criterion has specifically modified its Renderware 3D software for such emerging platforms.

In the US there are already 70m analogue boxes in use. The introduction of digital networks will substantially open up the possibilities for gaming.

American service provider ICTV has already begun signing up companies to provide content for its network. To date, publishers Gremlin, The Learning Company, Activision, Interplay and Acclaim are on board. One of ICTV's key advantages is the access speed of its cable network – 10Mb/sec.



Dump your consoles and that troublesome PC. According to set-top evangelists, all gamers will need is a black box on top of their TVs

In a separate move, Motorola has renamed its 'Blackbird' box, Streamaster. It will be one of the first units to ship with infamous VM Labs Nuon chipset.

Closer to home, Euro cable company NTL will shortly be announcing two new developers, who along with Infogrames will be providing games for its Game One channel. The two other UK digital services, Sky's OpenTV and Cable and Wireless' Access, have yet to release their plans for 3D gaming but OpenTV already has an agreement with Hasbro for titles including *Battleships*.

SENSIBLE BUY FOR CODEMASTERS

Jon Hare to head up new developments at **Edge**'s buoyant publisher of '98

Two of the UK's oldest software houses joined forces with the announcement that Codemasters is to buy Sensible Software for an undisclosed sum. As part of the deal **Jon Hare**, Sensible's co-founder, will lead a series of new developments for Codemasters. The company also gains the rights over Sensible's back catalogue and intellectual property, including franchises such as *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder*.

"For Sensible Software to continue developing games true to its heritage, the only way was to allow it to be integrated into a like-minded company," Hare explained.

Codemasters' year-on-year growth rate is 250 per cent and sales are predicted to reach £70m this year. A new publishing partner in the States will be announced soon.

Both companies formed in 1986 although recently there has been a marked difference in their respective performances. After early success with games for the C64 and Amiga, Sensible struggled to succeed with CD-ROM titles.



There will be no more *Sex'n'Drugs'n'Rock'n'Roll* for Jon 'Jops' Hare

CUTTINGS

Interactive Link
Zelda: Ocarina of Time was the victor at the 1999 Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences Awards. It was voted the Interactive Title of the Year, and collected five other awards.

Name dropping
Following its recent take over, Gremlin has become Infogrames' Sheffield House. Meanwhile Acclaim has dropped its Probe and Iguana studio names, replacing them with Acclaim Studios London and Teesside respectively.

Get bleem!
Sony's hostility towards the *bleem!* PlayStation emulator boiled over at the E3 show where it attempted to have the *bleem!* stand removed.

Good god, bad god
Peter Molyneux has suggested a novel marketing strategy for *Black and White*. He is considering selling two versions of the game: one in a black box and one in a white box. The white box will cost £5 more, although it will have the same contents. "The extra £5 will go to charity," Molyneux explains. "It means that you are making a good-versus-bad decision before you even play the game."

Coin-ops out
After posting losses of $378m for 1998, Sega is trimming back its Japanese arcade business. In a move to restructure the company for Dreamcast, it plans to close 101 arcade centres.

Hot kit
Next-generation PlayStation development kits will ship worldwide in September, Sony has announced. The proprietary system will cost around $20,000 and operate within a Linux environment.

Redmond gets Solid
Microsoft's steady rise as a game publisher has been underlined by a licensing deal with Konami. The Japanese giant now has the option to publish Microsoft games for consoles while Microsoft gains control of Konami titles for PC. The companies also plan to collaborate on new developments. Expect a PC version of *Metal Gear Solid* before the end of the year.

PRESCREEN

EDGE PREMIERES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT'S FRESHEST FACES

Cash for content

Game developers collide with high finance

The videogame industry is now big business, something highlighted by news of EA's turnover breaking the $1bn mark. The revelation might have been great for the industry's profile, but its effect on US armchair investors could actually be more important. They don't care about companies, only percentages.

This unveiling of the industry is significant. Few would dispute that EA knows how to run a business – the acquisitions of Westwood, Origin and Bullfrog alone proved that. More worrying for gamers is the suspicion that the clockwork efficiency of its release schedule (*Tiberian Sun* excepted) hides a hole where game content goes. The question is, does this matter any more?

This was underlined by one E3 episode. Fresh from record-breaking results, Eidos barred UK journos from viewing *Tomb Raider IV* following an alleged hostility towards it precursor. So, who did get to see the game? Financial analysts. But can you blame Eidos? Maintaining its share price is at least as important as keeping the specialist press happy. More to the point, it worked, with analysts excited by 'news' of *Tomb Raider V*.

Concern has been sparked by the French invasion, meanwhile. Fuelled by incredible share performance, Infogrames and Titus have gone on spending sprees. And they have found many of the more creative developers grossly undervalued. Gremlin has been assimilated and renamed, its release schedules merged into Infogrames' with obvious results – some titles have been released too early, other pushed way back. Perhaps the barometer of this deal will be the future of DMA. A beacon of creativity, four of its recent titles have sunk. How it fits into the new corporate structure will be an acid test of Infogrames' intentions.

More worrying, however, is the case of Interplay, into which virtual unknown Titus has bought a controlling stake. Despite lacking any game pedigree, Titus demonstrates the power of business acumen. It has already paid out $35m for a controlling stake in Interplay. More worrying are the rumours that it will move on Virgin, too (Interplay already has a 44 per cent stake in Virgin, after all). The situation beggars belief. Two highly prestigious publishers could end up being controlled by a company whose claim to fame are the *Superman* and *Blues Brothers* licences. But that's business. When you play with the big boys, people get whacked. And sadly it always seems to be the dreamers who get their glasses broken.







***Tomb Raider III*, *Tiberian Sun* and *Giants*: titles from, respectively, Eidos, Virgin and Interplay – three companies whose businesses are now more closely tied to the financial sector than ever**

Edge's most wanted

Incoming: four picks from a vast crop



F355 Challenge

(Coin-op) Sega

Sega is taking its penchant for realism to the max with what stands to be the most authentic coin-op ever made. All that and the official Ferrari licence, too.



Resident Evil: Nemesis

(PS) Capcom

It may be a sequel, but Capcom is at least attempting to put a spin on the series' storyline. **Edge** talks to the game's producer next issue.



Red Dog

(DC) Sega

Earning a place among the tastiest-looking DC titles shown at E3, this tank blaster looks set to feature some of that old Argonaut magic.



Brave Fire Fighters

(Coin-op) Sega

A simple concept – point your photosensitive hose at the screen and put out virtual fires – and one sure to inject still more diversity into coin-op gaming.

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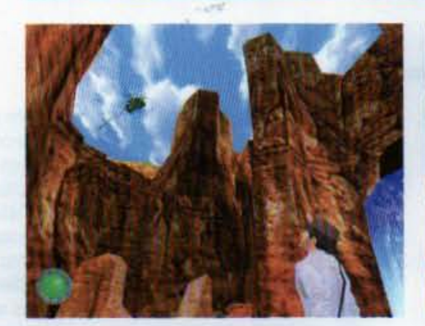


PRESCREEN ALPHAS

INDY RETURNS IN COSMETICALLY IMPROVED FORM WHILE THE E3 OVERSPILL SQUEEZES IN

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

FORMAT: **PC/PS** DEVELOPER: **LUCASARTS**











After the exploitative 'Star Wars' game fiasco (see Testscreens), LucasArts should now settle down and concentrate on what has enough potential to turn out to be the company's best title of 1999. It's distinctly different from Indy's previous forays into gameworlds, in that all of the action now takes place against realtime 3D backdrops. Indy's repertoire of abilities has also grown extensively, and in addition to the usual walking, running, jumping, searching and shooting, this adventure sees the archaeology lecturer make use of different vehicles. Similarities to the *Tomb Raider* series hasn't escaped critical eyes, although LucasArts will no doubt work hard to distance its title from Lara territory as much as possible before it ships towards the end of the year.

FEAR FACTOR

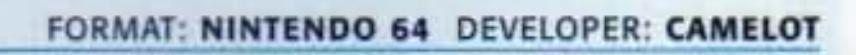
FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION** DEVELOPER: **KRONOS DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT**








Fear Factor was one of E3's more pleasant surprises. It sees you taking control of three mercenaries attempting to find the daughter of a Triad leader, and incorporates prerendered, animated backgrounds with realtime anime-influenced characters. Using clever camerawork, Kronos has achieved stylishly cinematic results. One of its neater touches is the way your character can multitrack, simultaneously firing off both guns at two different enemies.



MARIO GOLF

FORMAT: **NINTENDO 64** DEVELOPER: **CAMELOT**






All right. It's golf. But it's Mario's version of golf. Surely that's worth checking out, right? Well, having experienced it at E3, **Edge** feels justified in delivering more shots of this new laughs-packed outing for the Brooklyn plumber. The usual clutch of Nintendo characters put in an appearance, but there are also more traditionally human forms to play as. From the developer of Namco's *Everybody's Golf*, this should be a great little game.

HYBRID HEAVEN

Konami's ambitious N64 title combining straightforward action adventure with traditional RPG elements was disappointing at E3. Admittedly, the show's noise levels are far from ideal to accurately assess a game of this nature, but first impressions count nonetheless. While the title should not be ruled out at this stage, Konami will have to implement a more refined control system and camera management routine for it to work. Review soon.





VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE

FORMAT: **PC** DEVELOPER: **NIHILISTIC SOFTWARE**

Having acquired the licence to White Wolf's successful Vampire roleplaying universe, Activision is now set to publish the first in a probable series based on the theme. The transition to the medium of digital entertainment has heralded a 3D adventure expected in the autumn. The epic tale spans many ages, eventually reaching modern day.









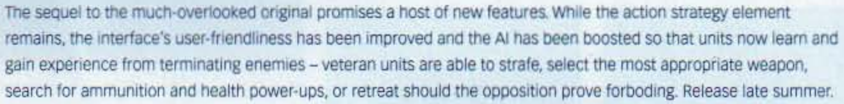


BATTLEZONE II

FORMAT: **PC** DEVELOPER: **PANDEMIC STUDIOS**







The sequel to the much-overlooked original promises a host of new features. While the action strategy element remains, the interface's user-friendliness has been improved and the AI has been boosted so that units now learn and gain experience from terminating enemies – veteran units are able to strafe, select the most appropriate weapon, search for ammunition and health power-ups, or retreat should the opposition prove forboding. Release late summer.













TENCHU II

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION** DEVELOPER: **SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT**

Despite its rather offbeat gameplay (introducing stealth concepts some time before *Metal Gear Solid* sneaked on to the scene), the original *Tenchu* was a substantial hit for Activision, so it's no surprise that the publisher has secured western publishing rights from Sony Music Entertainment for the sequel. Expect new weapons and larger playing areas along with the same clichéd themes of ancient Japan that ran through the original game.



GEKIDO

Coming this autumn courtesy of Gremlin, *Gekido* will offer PlayStation owners the opportunity of taking one of four selectable characters with which to vanquish a series of bad guys in interactive 3D environments. If all goes according to plan, this should have fans of legendary 2D side-scrolling beat 'em ups such as *Double Dragon* foaming at the mouth. Like Tecmo's classic, *Gekido* also offers weapons to complement the hand-to-hand martial arts action.





HARRIER 2001

FORMAT: **NINTENDO 64** DEVELOPER: **VIDEO SYSTEM/PARADIGM**









Based on the world's only vertical-take-off-and-landing fighter jet, *Harrier 2001* made its second E3 appearance somewhat nearer to its end-of-year release date. Given the N64's architecture, a full-blown simulation in the mould of PC extravaganzas would be an unreasonable expectation. Still, technical competence, over 20 missions and 50 weapons will be in place.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION** DEVELOPER: **NEVERSOFT**







Proving that it's not only the Brian Laras and Naseem Hameds of this world who get to plaster their image all over videogames, America's premier skateboarder has licensed his name, along with a selection of his signature moves, to NeverSoft's new action sports title. Few though they are, previous examples of this genre have disappointed, but this played impressively at E3.

MINI RACERS

FORMAT: **NINTENDO 64** DEVELOPER: **LOOKING GLASS STUDIOS**

Another new title amid Nintendo's E3 N64 offerings, *Mini Racers* is 3D radio-controlled car action for one to four players. While not particularly revolutionary, the multiplayer aspect should give this *Micro Machines*-style appeal. Interestingly, when more than one joypad is plugged in, the tracks can be viewed in either splitscreen or in their entirety via a top-down perspective. **Edge** hopes this could be a *Super Sprint* for the '90s.



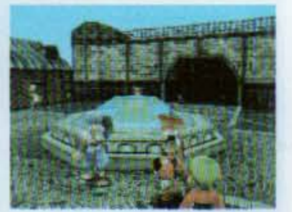
DEW PRISM

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION** DEVELOPER: **SQUARESOFT**

Funky name, funky game. These are the first shots from SquareSoft's new action RPG, which will be deeper than the likes of *Brave Fencer Musashiden* but not as heavy as *FFVII*. Players select between two characters, Ru and Mint, at the beginning of the game, and the storyline unfolds accordingly (you'll meet up with the character you didn't select later in your quest). Square has attempted to include believable facial expressions in what looks like a very pretty title.

















FORMULA 1

EA's alleged promise to treat its recently acquired F1 licence the same way as it does the FIFA property is likely to please only the mass market. Even Joe Average surely has his limits, though, and with more than enough F1 games already available, the prospect of another two or three a year from the major publisher could see the genre rapidly reach saturation status. EA's marketing muscle will give this PC and PS racer a chance, anyhow.





TOP GEAR RALLY 2

FORMAT: **NINTENDO 64** DEVELOPER: **SAFFIRE CORP**

The E3 demo of this point-to-point racer must have left visitors to Kemco's stand disappointed. Among several immediately noticeable problems, odd handling and average visuals were chief culprits, but given that the title isn't due until October, the remaining months may see amends being made.











RED DOG

Argonaut brings arcade-style shooting right down to earth with its Red Dog assault vehicle. And while the singleplayer is cool enough, the multiplayer is really hot







It's an Argonaut shoot 'em up so expect fast-moving action and plenty of pretty explosions













One of the key aspects of *Red Dog* is its use of all four Dreamcast ports. The multiplayer mode will be addictive

An excited **Jez San** describes the pitch as *"Star Fox* in a tank", and considering over four million units of that franchise sold, only a fool would have failed to sit up and take notice of *Red Dog*. However, prior to its unveiling at E3, little information had leaked out about one of the key Dreamcast Euro launch titles.

Set on an archetypal future world, the game puts you in control of the Red Dog assault vehicle, the term 'tank' being seen as something of a misnomer considering the game's arcade-style feel. The *Star Fox* half of the brief is definitely in evidence: health and weapon power-ups, ranging from mines to guided missiles, are scattered around, and with waves of enemy robots, spiders, tanks and spaceships to be quickly destroyed, the action is fast.

As you would expect from Argonaut, the small development team is pushing the technology envelope as well. "We're maxing out the hardware with custom hand-coded 3D rendering libraries," explains San. "We're using hardware features that have been little used so far on the other Dreamcast games."

Red Dog also makes full use of the joypad. Forward and backward movement is controlled with the right and left triggers respectively, and although control is initially tricky, it quickly becomes intuitive. The joystick is used to move the cross-hairs for the laser cannon, fired with the A button, while special weapons don't require cross-hairs for targeting and are launched with the B button. However, *Red Dog* isn't just about gung-ho shooting. One innovative element is the addition of a small, forward-facing forcefield. The X button activates the moveable shield, which can then be positioned with the joystick to repel enemy fire

Argonaut admits that there's still work to be done on the singleplayer game, most notably on the lighting effects and the introduction of more enemies, but where *Red Dog* really shines is with its multiplayer mode. In the two arenas shown, lifts and aerial roadways provide a platform feel, with the responsiveness of the vehicles creating an addictive multiplayer experience, something which is sadly lacking from many combat vehicle games.

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Argonaut**
Release: **September**
Origin: **UK**

ONIMUSHA: DEMON WARRIOR

***Resident Evil* might be spawning numerous sequels, but Capcom remains committed to new titles. Its latest take mixes magic, katanas and evil ninjas**





One of the additional features to gameplay is the introduction of magic. At the launch, however, the only magic on display was a fire attack (above)







Capcom claims that *Onimusha* will be far more action-based than the *Res Evil* recipe of suspense and tension

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Capcom**

Developer: **Flagship**

Release: **Christmas (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

Capcom has never had it so good. Not only is *Resident Evil: Nemesis* primed for PlayStation and *Code Veronica* for Dreamcast, but the original *Res Evil* team is scaling up with the hotly tipped *Dino Crisis*. Everyone has gone mad for the world of survival horror. But for the latest variation on the theme, Capcom has turned its back on the western scenarios such as Raccoon City that have characterised the series so far. Instead, it has shifted its attention back into Japanese history. *Onimusha*, meaning 'demon warrior', is set a few hundred years ago in the Sengoku era, and historical veracity will feature heavily in the storyline. The plot follows the main character, Akechi Samanosuke, as he attempts to fight his way into an enemy castle to rescue his kidnapped cousin.

At the Japanese launch preview, only one level was available and this demonstrated the rather muted tones of the period scenery. The quality of the backgrounds was notably superior to *Res Evil 2*, though, as were the load times when accessing different stages ingame. As *Onimusha* uses the same engine that powered *Res Evil 2*, it's therefore no great surprise that the controls are similar as well, with R1 setting a fighting stance, square for running and the cross for action or sword attacks. In addition, pressing triangle will launch special attacks such as magic. The gameplay seems to mix the stealthy ninja qualities highlighted in *Tenchu* with all the fighting moves expected from a sword-based game. Capcom promises that the title will be far more action-based compared to the nail-biting tension generated by the *Resident Evil* series.

Developer Flagship has an impressive pedigree, too. Owned by Okamoto-san, the producer of *Street Fighter II*, the *Onimusha* team includes Inafune-san, producer of *Bio-Hazard 2*, while director Takeuchi-san also worked on both the survival horror titles.

The importance of the domestic market was underlined by the lavishness of the launch announcement. Over 200 traditional musicians and the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra regaled journalists with the official *Onimusha* theme. Another carefully thought-out tie-in sees young Asian personality Takeshi Kaneshiro cameo as the face of Akechi Samanosuke. Half Chinese and half Japanese, Kaneshiro-san stars in numerous TV dramas and adverts, and was present at the launch to express his personal excitement about the project.





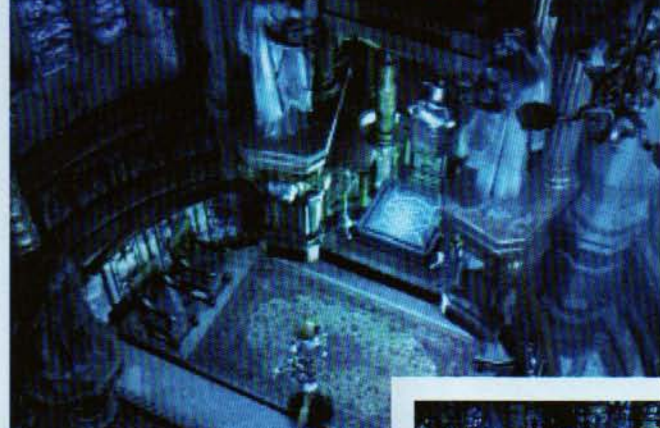


Taking the gamers back to the Sengoku period, historical accuracy is an important part of *Onimusha*'s plot

KOUDELKA

Forget zombies, ninjas and dinosaurs – the latest iteration of 'survival horror' sees players battling metaphysical evil with a psychic young gypsy somewhere near Aberystwyth








Three characters will be playable, but these screenshots show the main protagonist – psychic gypsy Koudelka – as she explores the haunted monastery. Ingame video shows off the smoothness of the animations and high character detail




Sacnoth has been busy creating the many beautifully prerendered backgrounds, which should rank with the best of any Square RPG

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **SNK**

Developer: **Sacnoth**

Release: **TBA**

Origin: **Japan**

Proving that survival horror is the killer genre of the moment, even 2D beat 'em up specialist SNK is moving into the nightmarish zone. The result is *Koudelka*. Developed by Sacnoth, a Square offshoot made up of staff who worked on *Seiken Densetsu 1* and *2*, it seems certain to enhance the PlayStation's longevity.

In a bizarre move for a Japanese developer, *Koudelka* is set in a haunted monastery overlooking the cliffs of Aberystwyth in the year 1898. In contrast to the overt gore of most survival horror titles, the game summons up a more eerie atmosphere: think *Silent Hill* meets Stephen King. The title will have a heavy narrative structure, too, and, as such, Sacnoth classes it as an RPG rather than an adventure title.

While concrete plot details are scarce, the monastery itself has a dark history, having been used in the past as a place of execution, and the ghost of a murdered girl resides there. The main protagonist is a young, psychic gypsy woman, Koudelka, while two other characters, James O'Flaherty (a priest on a mission to recover a mysterious stolen item) and Edward Plunkett are also playable. O'Flaherty's religious status, combined with the overall spooky atmosphere, reinforces the concept that the evil forces at work in *Koudelka* are spiritual rather than physical. Blasphemous rituals, old crypts and the souls of executed prisoners will feature strongly, as will scaly demons, skeletons, phantoms and even spectrally possessed suits of armour. Combat will not occur in real time, though. Rather it will be in the vein of classic RPGs such as *Final Fantasy VII*, with magic dominating the encounters.

Graphically, as with the *Bio-Hazard* series, one of the game's most striking points is its fantastic prerendered backgrounds. Video footage of the work-in-progress also reveals the quality of the animation, with movement looking smooth. Characters will be highly detailed, too. Important events will be driven by the usual array of cut-scenes and the dialogue in these features convincing lip synch.

With *Resident Evil: Nemesis*, *Onimusha* and *Dino Crisis* all to come, PlayStation owners are obviously in no hurry to switch consoles. But the question for Sony now becomes, will the next-generation PlayStation launch with games rendered with this much care?




Combat is the classic out-of-scene RPG-style *à la FFVII*, with magic spells dominating encounters

RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Road-racing realism is the objective as the race to burn virtual rubber hots up on the PC. But will Europress be able to take on and beat the leaders?











You may not immediately recognise the models sporting the unfamiliar liveries, but the action is as good as with WRC cars

This, Europress would like you to believe, is not only going to be the best rally game of all time but possibly the best driving game of all time. No easy feat, as you'll no doubt agree. After all, the competition is rather fierce: not only does it have to displace Codemasters' expertly accomplished *Colin McRae Rally* from the top spot, but it also has to nudge out newcomers *V-Rally 2* and *Rally Masters*, among others. And that's before you pit it against *Gran Turismo*, *Grand Prix II*, *GP Legends* and their illustrious kin.

Nevertheless, *Rally Championship* hopes to achieve this by providing the most realistic recreation of this exciting yet much overlooked sport, and while **Edge** has so far been unable to properly test the game's dynamics, the graphics are certainly heading the right way, managing a quasi-photorealistic appearance. Realism is a fine thing, of course, but some elements are undeniably sacrificed to the god of gaming in order that playability is ensured. This is something Codemasters understands very well and hopefully Magnetic Fields is keeping it in mind when it comes to finalising game mechanics. But early indications suggest that the dev team is making all the right moves. The game focuses on the official British Rally Championship, although you'll also be able to try out the 420-odd miles of the most gruelling roads the UK has to offer in the more powerful WRC cars (as driven by McRae and co). In addition, there's an arcade mode (as in *Sega Rally*) with which to hone your overtaking skills, as well as the usual time trial and multiplayer options.

As authenticity plays such a major part in the proceedings, you can expect animated drivers, working dashboards, deformable bodywork, working lights, extensive weather and particle effects (smoke, sparks, mud and water splashes). And every car officially entered into the championship is featured – complete with specific livery in place, naturally. Furthermore, every metre of the 36 stages available has allegedly been recreated with assistance from exhaustive video footage.

It's an audacious project and, given its current bullish marketing campaign, Europress had better deliver the goods or be prepared to face a severe critical onslaught.

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Europress**

Developer: **Magnetic Fields**

Release: **Late '99**

Origin: **UK**







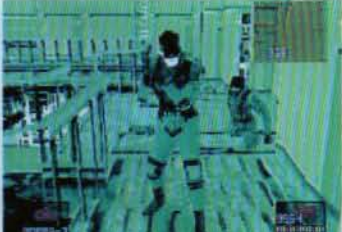
Hopefully, the handling dynamics will ensure playability as well as supreme authenticity

METAL GEAR SOLID: INTEGRAL

The people's choice, Solid Snake, gets new replay value with a virtual reality training mission disc and the option to sneak and shoot in firstperson perspective



One of the most requested changes in *Metal Gear Solid: Integral* is use of the firstperson mode for moving and shooting, but stealth remains crucial









Costume changes allow Solid Snake to tux up and cameo as James Bond (left), while many levels provide the ninja as an alternative playable character. Are stinger missiles the best way to take out a guard? (Above)







With 300 VR missions, even the most able player will have their work cut out finishing this version of *MSG* in only ten hours

With the success of *Metal Gear Solid* rocketing Konami into second place in the league of Japanese developers, few have been surprised by a consolidation of the franchise. Just as Square repackaged *Final Fantasy VII* as *FFVII International*, so *Metal Gear Solid: Integral* collects features from the US version with some fan-requested modifications. Ostensibly a third add-on disc of training stages bundled together with a new version of the original two-disc game, it's aimed firmly at the domestic market. With this in mind, Konami has dropped the price from the usual ¥5,800 (£30) to ¥4,990 (£26) in Japan to encourage existing owners to upgrade. In the rest of the world, where it is currently labouring under the unwieldy title *Metal Gear Solid VR Special Edition*, the mission disc will be released as a standalone product.

One of the more radical options provided for Japanese gamers is the ability to vary the difficulty level. Notoriously averse to seeing their character killed, the original game was equivalent to the European 'easy' setting. With *Metal Gear Solid: Integral*, however, five difficulty levels are available, from 'very easy', in which players start with a silenced Socom and unlimited ammunition, to the radar-less 'hard' and 'very hard', in which the field of vision of the guards is doubled.

More interestingly, the additional disc contains 300 new virtual reality training missions. And finishing *Integral* unlocks the much-demanded firstperson perspective. Combined with the ability to randomise the position of guards and items, it provides the level of replay some malcontents complained the original lacked.

Another Japanese-inspired addition is PocketStation compatibility. After clearing each stage of the training disc, players will receive one of 48 different grades that can be downloaded on to the PDA unit. Players can then exchange them in a similar way to Game Boy *Pocket Monsters*. Another change peculiar to the home market allows gamers to have their Codec conversations with English dialogue and Japanese subtitles, as is the situation in Japan with most American movies and DVDs. For the Japanese, at least, the most movie-like game has just got more cinematic.

Format:	**PlayStation**
Publisher:	**Konami**
Developer:	**In-house**
Release:	**Out now (Japan)**
Origin:	**Japan**

DIABLO II

Despite the continued showcasing of firstperson shooters and realtime strategy games, it's arguably the revival of the roleplaying game that is most occupying PC gamers



The dull dungeons of *Diablo* have given way to four fully populated towns, each riddled with caverns and crypts and flanked by wilderness areas







***Diablo II* now pre-loads areas ahead of the player, so the smoothly flowing action is never jarred by the intrusion of the PC's CD drive**





Blizzard has stuck with non-poly graphics in *Diablo II*, but they are far richer and more atmospheric than in the original game

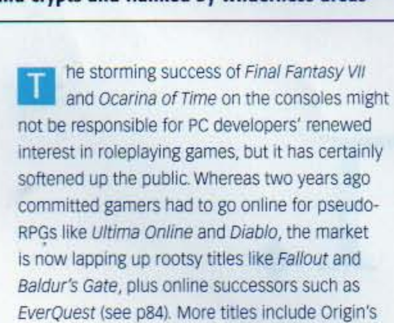
Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Havas**

Developer: **Blizzard North**

Release: **Autumn**

Origin: **US**



The storming success of *Final Fantasy VII* and *Ocarina of Time* on the consoles might not be responsible for PC developers' renewed interest in roleplaying games, but it has certainly softened up the public. Whereas two years ago committed gamers had to go online for pseudo-RPGs like *Ultima Online* and *Diablo*, the market is now lapping up rootsy titles like *Fallout* and *Baldur's Gate*, plus online successors such as *EverQuest* (see p84). More titles include Origin's *Ultima Ascension*, Infogrames' *Silver* and a revitalised *Diablo II*.

Blizzard's pioneering dungeon romp was seen as diabolic in some quarters. Comparisons with *Gauntlet* flattered Diablo's point-and-click combat system and RPG elements were more apparent on the vigilante- and hacker-frequented noticeboards of the Battle.net community. Nevertheless, it sold nearly a million copies – a huge number for any PC title. "The roleplaying genre has so much to offer and there's so much further it can go," says Blizzard's **Bill Roper**, producer on the sequel. "It will grow in leaps and bounds, and we hope *Diablo II* will be considered part of that evolution."

Roper claims the skill tree at the heart of *Diablo II* was inspired by Blizzard's own *Starcraft*. As characters gain experience, you distribute points among a tree of skills unique to each character class (Amazon, Paladin, Sorceress, Necromancer or Barbarian). Higher skills are gained by achieving a proficiency in the basics. "The skill tree will allow players to really customise their characters," says Roper. "Two sorceresses of an equivalent level may have focused their points in completely different areas, and both would be beneficial to an adventuring party for different reasons."

Suggesting that *Starcraft* invented this concept is at best naive, but *Diablo II*'s treatment is attractive. An elegant graphical solution replaces what is usually a mess of statistics and punctuation. Likewise, instead of trawling through equipment lists, you simply look at what your character is wearing and wielding.

Diablo II's 2D environments are far richer in atmosphere and detail than the dank original, and much of the game is now set outdoors. Everything is better, in fact. A client/server network model should stifle the online cheating that crippled the original, while the game itself features myriad improvements suggested by *Diablo*'s huge online community, from a simple run ability to online clan rooms enabling allies to swap equipment and tips.

"We want people to play this game for months and still not have explored every nuance it has to offer," says Roper.

ESPION-AGENTS

NEC's internal development team has avoided 'grown-up' game genres so far. With this ambitious adventure, though, it seems to be attempting them all at the same time








Visually, the title looks a little unpolished at the moment, but at least the gameplay proves more promising than previous in-house efforts from NEC





The game combines exploration, mission management and a fair dose of fighting to promising effect

It's not wholly surprising that NEC's internal dev team was one of the first thirdparties to get involved with Dreamcast development – the company does, after all, manufacture VideoLogic's PowerVR chipset, which provides the processing grunt behind Sega's machine. What is surprising, though, is the company's mediocre output so far: *Seventh Cross*, an A-life simulation, and *Sengoku-Turb*, a kids' game with distinctive visuals but little great gameplay.

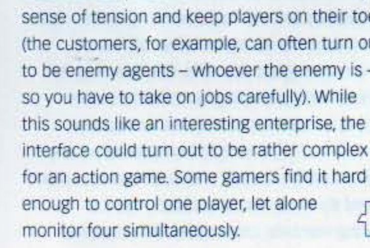
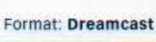
Espion-agents could represent a turnaround in fortunes, then. Combining elements of *Impossible Mission*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines*, the game is set in the 21st century and requires you to lead a crack squad of mercenary spies on a selection of missions for a series of shady 'customers'. Before each mission, you have to choose the four members of your team most suited to the particular task, as everyone has their own individual skills and strengths – a gameplay feature familiar to anyone who's ever played Dungeons & Dragons. The interesting part, however, is the game display, which uses four windows – one for each character – so you can continually monitor the actions of the entire group. The main window represents the team member currently being controlled, but you can switch between them whenever you like. When you're not controlling them, the AI takes over.

Throughout the game, the team gains experience points and learns new skills (computer hacking for instance). The story is also filled with surprises and double-crosses to up the sense of tension and keep players on their toes (the customers, for example, can often turn out to be enemy agents – whoever the enemy is – so you have to take on jobs carefully). While this sounds like an interesting enterprise, the interface could turn out to be rather complex for an action game. Some gamers find it hard enough to control one player, let alone monitor four simultaneously.



RPG text boxes (above) and espionage (right). A winning combination?



Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **NEC Home Elec.**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **September (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

DYNAMITE COP 2

The original was an ST-V hit in '96. Now Sega's 'Die Hard'-inspired action adventure is buffed up for the modern arcade and promises a pristine Dreamcast conversion





Players can use a variety of background objects as weapons, as in Capcom's recent hit, *Power Stone*



The original *Dynamite Cop* was heavily influenced by the film 'Die Hard'. Although the sequel to the game has distanced itself from the film, it retains the same mix of breakneck action, heavy weaponry and a bevvy of humorous touches





As in the 'Die Hard' films, the action takes place in one location – this time it's aboard a luxury cruiser (top)

Format: **Coin-op/Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Sega**

Developer: **AM2**

Release: **Summer**

Origin: **Japan**

Developed by AM1 in 1996, the original *Dynamite Cop* ran on the old Saturn-powered ST-V arcade board, and performed unexpectedly well in the west, where Sega managed to secure a licence and call it 'Die Hard' (the main character – shoeless and gun happy – was always meant to ape Bruce Willis anyway). While it's been a long time coming, the sequel sees Sega retaining the basic thirdperson wandering beat 'em up premise, and attempting to appeal to the market where it hit biggest – the US (part of the team went across to the States and worked with game designers there). However, AM2 has jettisoned the film concept this time around, opting to produce an original story, with new characters, instead.

So now you get to choose from three soldiers each with their own fighting styles: Bruno Dillinger (uses boxing and pro-wrestling), Jean Aibi (Chinese Kempo) and Eddy Brown (Muay Thai and Judo). The objective, essentially, is to storm a cruise ship called Bermuda and kill all the baddies aboard. Perhaps taking a few notes from Capcom's excellent *Power Stone*, the game makes great use of its free-roaming 3D environments providing its characters with a raft of movement animations and spatial freedom so they can fight from just about any angle. In addition, each character can also pick up and throw almost any object – be it a vending machine, chair, table, fish (from the captain's table) or toilet. The prospect of two fighters squaring up against each other – one brandishing a cod, the other an Armitage Shanks cistern – is strangely appealing.

As usual in these affairs, players can pick up 'coins' along the way; collecting five will improve your character's fighting ability for a limited time period. There are also a few special items which give you access to 'special power attacks', while the weapons roster is pretty extensive, with machine guns, rocket launchers and crossbows all available for automated carnage. The version on show at E3 looked close to its Model 2-powered parent – good news for action-hungry Dreamcast owners.





Like the original, *DC2* boasts some great background effects (above and top left), and gung-ho cinematic moments (right)

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Known for publishing several FIA-licensed Formula One titles over the last eight years, Video System tries its hand at conquering the Dreamcast F1 market. So far, so good...









The level of detail exceeds anything previous F1 games have managed – from the team's specific steering wheel (including logos) to gear-changing fingers



All three of the tracks currently completed faithfully represent their real counterparts – even down to the colour of the trackside grass

Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Video System**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **November**

Origin: **UK**

Well, **Edge** wouldn't be what it is without at least a couple of Formula One-based games within its monthly pages, and as the N64's *F-1 World Grand Prix II* is reviewed on p89, taking a closer look at how its Dreamcast-powered equivalent is doing seemed like the appropriate course of action.

And things are looking rather tasty. Work only began last December, but already three beautifully recreated tracks are complete, with five cars (from five teams) able to race around them, each boasting a working set of dynamics. Although the recent E3 demo attempted to bridge the gap between simulation and arcade handling (with unsuccessful results), the final version plans to include both options to cater for either side of the potential audience. At the moment, the dynamics swing towards the simulation end of the spectrum (with emphasis on oversteering), meaning a substantial amount of driving techniques can be applied, instantly reducing lap times.

The graphics are some of the best yet seen adorning a Formula One game. The Hockenheim, Suzuka and Silverstone circuits have been painstakingly reproduced and the subtle use of colour results in a particularly authentic look – even the grass is the right shade of green, in accordance with the track's geographical location. This attention to detail is carried throughout the other aspects of the game and, of course, across to the cars themselves, which are faithfully modelled on their real-life equivalents, with all the aerodynamic accessories correctly in place.

The last two versions **Edge** has played would have benefited from more progressive, less sensitive, steering. Video System is no doubt attempting to recreate the extreme directness of an F1 car, but a little more travel in the analogue control would improve playability. Currently, there is also a slight lack of speed, and cars appear to hover slightly above the track when using either of the chase-cam views.

Nevertheless, it's early days yet, and **Edge** is confident that Video System will tweak all of these elements in time for the game's release at the end of the year. Dreamcast-owning F1 fans could well have something rather special to look forward to.







The handling is far from finished, but its understeering nature does make it easier to admire the lovely smoke effects (top)



Coals to Newcastle is nothing compared to coin-ops to Tokyo. But that's precisely where Parisian developer Toka intends to take its adventure-based beat 'em up

The developers are huddled around a battered *Killer Instinct* cabinet. The guts of their game, *Soul Fighter*, are spilling out of the back. They've been hard at work all night, all week, preparing it for scrutiny. Now the first level is complete and the only pieces missing are cut-scenes, some special effects and a final music track. The current score, which consists of Japanese sub-indie noise, floods the room as the coders take turns to try out the results of their labour. For in a few days, the arcade board will travel to the most hardcore games market in the world. French devco Toka is attempting something that few western developers have done successfully: making an impact in Japanese arcades. And not just in any old genre either. *Soul Fighter* targets the heartland of the Japanese gaming community – the beat 'em up. But if at first this seems daft, there is reason in the madness.

"We have always been Sega fans and arcade fighting game fans," explains technical director **Carlo Perconti**. "We try to make arcade games on consoles. Now, because of new hardware, it's possible to make something for coin-op use."

After developing three titles for the PlayStation, Toka decided it was time to move on. A well-regarded developer, just 16 staff strong, it felt the PlayStation had been technically pushed to its limit. To accomplish the graphical detail Toka desired, new games would have to be developed for next-generation consoles. With this in mind, planning started in July '98, with work on *Soul Fighter*'s 3D engine commencing in September.

Territorial strategies

It was then that the catalyst for the Japanese coin-op adventure entered into the equation. After years spent in the European games industry, most recently with Virgin and Eidos respectively, **Louie Beatty** and **Vincent Pargney** set up a company called Piggyback. Its *modus operandi* is literally to piggyback developers, acting as publisher and also helping developers to specifically market games for different territories. Piggyback is the reason *Soul Fighter* is primarily aimed at the Japanese sector.

"We decided to develop a game for the coin-op market and cross over to the console market," says Pargney. "Fortunately, when we were talking with some Japanese companies they liked the idea. We were surprised, but if the game is

Format: **Coin-op/Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Piggyback**
Developer: **Toka**
Release: **TBA (coin-op) September (DC)**
Origin: **France**









As well as expansive scenery, Toka's custom 3D engine can deal with internal sections such as caves and buildings equally well. Vibrant lighting effects complete the picture

good, the game is good, even if it is coming from a European developer."

The current situation in Japan is grim, though. Arcades are in decline; spending per person dropped by approximately 30 per cent during 1998. The industry's response has been to hit back with more expensive cabinets and specialised controllers: everything from the sniper sim *Silent Scope* to *Get Bass* and the Bemani explosion. How can a fighting game housed in a standard three-button Jamma cabinet expect to make an impact in this environment?

"In Japanese arcades the first floor is for the big cabinet games," states Perconti. "But the second floor is full of fighting games. There are two coin-op markets, really, so there are still plenty of opportunities for normal fighting games."

Horses for courses

How big the opportunities are for a European 'normal fighting game' is another matter. Despite suggestions that the French are, graphically at least, the Japanese of European gaming, developing for the Japanese market isn't simply a case of adding subtitles and redesigning cover artwork. There are specific reasons *Tomb Raider* didn't sell in Japan. One was Eidos' reluctance to modify the Japanese version of the game (Nipponese gamers would've preferred Lara in a more manga-esque style). Conversely, *Crash 3* has sold over a million copies because the Japanese version was specifically tweaked.

"The Japanese market prefers a lot of bright colours, blues and pinks, and cutesy animations like butterflies," explains Beatty. "Unless you live in Japan you can't imagine what they want." Allusions to Japanese fairytales and history were one element suggested for *Soul Fighter*. But the main change so far has been to the skin colour of one of the characters, the Warrior.



After 'saving' (ie, killing) all the souls on a level, it's time to meet the boss. Level one sees a grizzly bear replete with club

Despite suggestions that the French are, graphically at least, the Japanese of European gaming, developing for the Japanese market isn't simply a case of adding subtitles and redesigning cover artwork

"In European games skin is brown-pink, whereas in Japan they expect something which is closer to brown-yellow," Beatty continues. "It's something they notice straight away." And while these are subtle changes, Toka is hoping that they will ease *Soul Fighter*'s passage into the most competitive marketplace. The last round of talks held with Japanese companies was very positive, although you can sense that the thoroughness with which Japanese companies work is sometimes frustrating for the team. To them, it's a completely different world out there.

As well as the visual aspects, *Soul Fighter*'s gameplay is obviously inspired by a love of Japanese fighting games, too.











Primarily designed as a coin-op title for Japanese arcades, *Soul Fighter* has been subtly tweaked for its Asian market. Changes include lightening skin tones and the introduction of cutesy butterfly and leaf animations. The red seahorse flags were another change suggested by the Japanese (above right)

"I think this game is along the same lines as *SpikeOut*," says Perconti. Coincidentally, like *SpikeOut*'s producer Toshihiro Nagoshi, whose previous project was *Daytona USA 2*, before embarking on *Soul Fighter*, Toka was best known for its two colourful, technically adept racing games, *Burning Road* and *Explosive Racing*. "*SpikeOut* is on the street and in 3D," Perconti remarks. "Hopefully we can be the first game in this kind of universe to add in fantasy as well."

It's difficult to imagine a trickier task than developing a game for the Japanese coin-op market and then porting it in time for the Euro Dreamcast launch in September

Narrative devices

Although the game's core is a 3D fantasy beat 'em up, it also introduces basic RPG elements into the mix. Each of the six levels is constructed as a large environment, albeit with a fairly linear walkthrough. There's even a plot of sorts: the population of your hometown has been turned into animal avatars, and the only way you can save them is to kill the animal forms, which allows you to collect the human souls, hence the game's title. After defeating the final dragon boss, these souls can be returned to their human forms.

The three-button control setup – punch, kick and block – drives the fighting, while a power bar can be charged up to provide a variety of combos. Fluid character movement is guaranteed thanks to a combination of lead artist Lyes Belaidouni's ten years of Judo and the expertise of Toka's in-house motion-capture studio. In addition to the hand-to-hand moves, each of the three characters, Warrior, Magician and Metisse, has a dedicated weapon. There are 14 additional weapons which are progressively made available. They're only effective for a limited period of time, however, to prevent

The Toka team (right) is proof that small devcos can still create strong titles in a short space of time – work on *Soul Fighter* only started last summer. An in-house motion-capture studio has aided the pace of development, as this human-as-skeleton 'actor' demonstrates (far right)







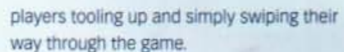








As well as a waterfall *à la Ocarina of Time*, Toka may also introduce a horse into the game. Motion capture might be tricky...





Mixing beat 'em up action with a variety of weapons, *Soul Fighter* promises hectic gameplay with a more exploratory style than other titles in the genre

players tooling up and simply swiping their way through the game.

In a novel twist, and one mirrored by fellow Parisian developer Quantic Dream's *Omikron*, four of the weapons switch the playing perspective into firstperson mode. It's a theme that runs through the game, with each level being broken down into smaller combat sequences thanks to the extensive use of cut-scenes. "Sometimes it's good to stop the player, to show them something and then have them come back to play with a new armament," suggests Perconti.

In this way, *Soul Fighter* mixes the smaller and intense 3D environments of beat 'em ups such as *Power Stone* and *Ehrgeiz* with more exploratory elements.



Combat should be intense, the engine maintaining a steady 60fps, even with up to ten enemies onscreen. Currently running on a P233 with a tweaked Voodoo 2, Toka expects the final coin-op iteration to use a P350 with either twin-Voodoo 2 or a Voodoo 3. Depending on the success of Japanese negotiations, there is the possibility of a Sega Naomi port, too.

Seal of approval

Soul Fighter has apparently gained official recognition – Piggyback claims it will be among the few Euro-developed DC launch titles (despite no confirmation from Sega). Differences between the games for the two platforms will be marginal, although the coin-op version will obviously be more straightforward and slightly harder, the arcade's golden three-minutes-equals-one-play rule being closely observed.

It's difficult to imagine a trickier task than developing a game for the Japanese coin-op market and then porting it in time for the Euro Dreamcast launch in September. Despite this, Piggyback and Toka seem remarkably optimistic about the game's chances. There is even talk of developing a sequel for the game, hinting at the next-generation PlayStation.

"We assume the Japanese market is the reference in terms of gaming," concludes Pargeny, with impeccable logic. "If you try to fit into this market, then it will fit anywhere." That much, at least, is true. *Soul Fighter* in Tokyo may be Sinatra in New York. If it can make it there, it can make it anywhere.

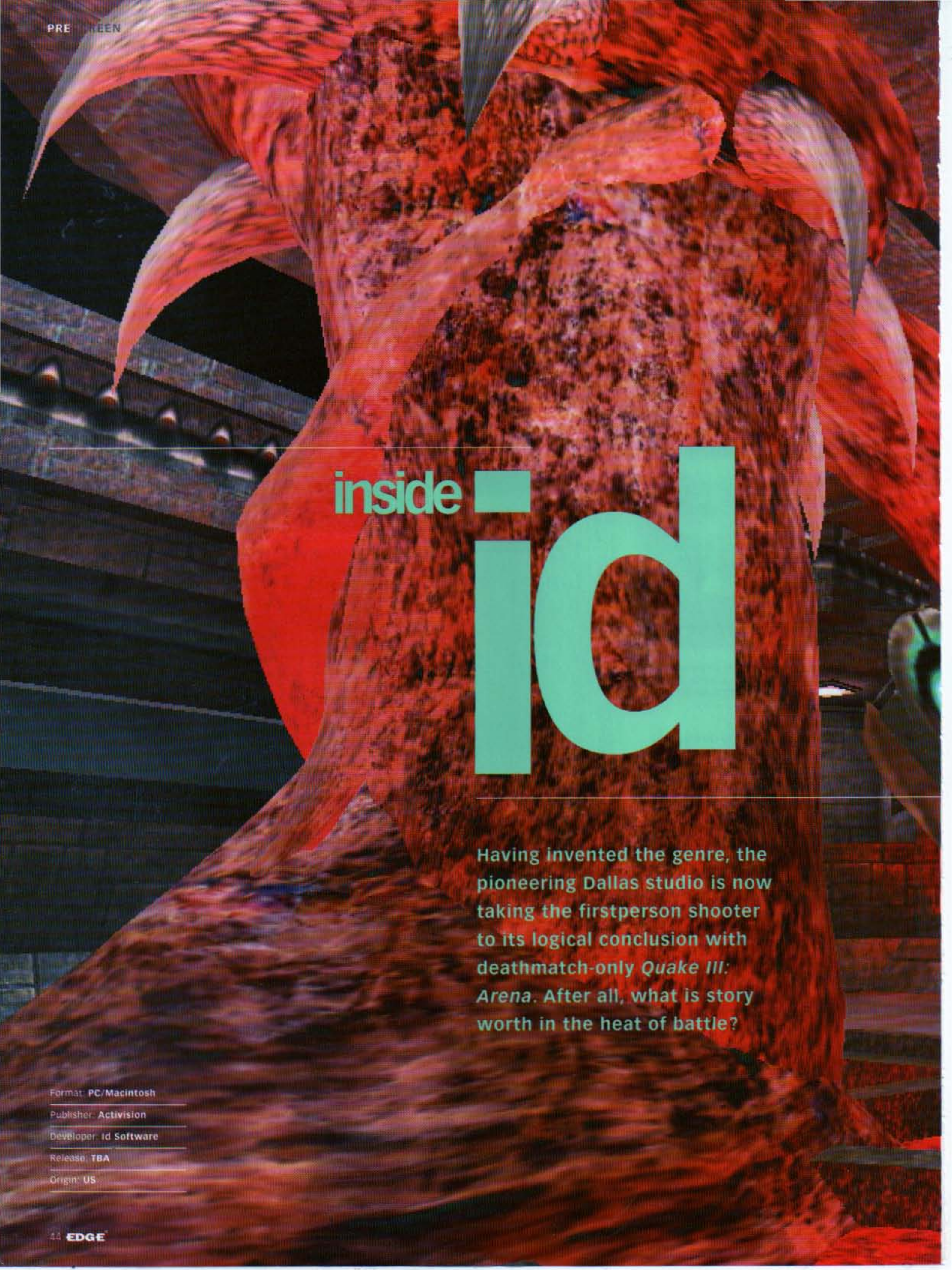








As well as fighting a barrage of enemies, players will have to deal with a variety of different traps and long-range weapons, such as flaming rocks



inside id

Having invented the genre, the pioneering Dallas studio is now taking the firstperson shooter to its logical conclusion with deathmatch-only *Quake III: Arena*. After all, what is story worth in the heat of battle?

Format: **PC/Macintosh**

Publisher: **Activision**

Developer: **Id Software**

Release: **TBA**

Origin: **US**



"So how y'all enjoying Texas?" asks **Miss Donna**, id Software's receptionist and den mother. Grow up watching both JR and JFK catch a bullet on and in Dallas, and still the first 'y'all' is a shock. It seems preposterous, like being hailed as 'squire' by a ticket-seller at a Real England experience in Stratford-upon-Avon. But this is Texas and this is Dallas, a virtual city built entirely by the fluke of oil wells, with weather that thinks nothing of dropping 20 degrees in as many minutes and then bringing tornados into the mix.

Drive down the freeways, past adverts for Christian Radio ('For Heaven's Sake change the Station') and lawyers you must call before calling an ambulance, and Dallas lies before you like the start of the TV show. They might as well hang 300ft-high letters – D–A–L–L–A–S – from the skyscrapers. The theme tune is already playing in your head.

Dallas' id Software is taking the founding precept of its home city to the next logical dimension, slowly taking the world into virtual reality. Since hitting the big time with

Wolfenstein 3D, id has pioneered everything from true 3D space to Internet gaming and the sadistic skills of level design. Now *Quake III: Arena* promises to marry the best in 3D engineering with the ultimate in deathmatches. If they get it right, id staffers joke that no one will ever need to make another deathmatch game. Not even id.

It's early morning, and the offices are deserted. **Edge** is having yet another reality check. The imagined gleaming, hi-tech offices with floor-to-ceiling frosted windows and slender orchids have been squashed by the messy fact of crummy suburban environs. Right up to the door plate – number 666 – the top floor of an obsidian cube off the freeway seems an ideal home for id, but inside it feels more like a student union than the world's best PC game developer.

Since no one is in yet, Miss Donna talks about the famous names who have passed through these rooms. Jon Romero, the flamboyant level designer who unbelievably first taught John Carmack how to code – and who tried to teach Miss Donna to play *Doom* with a mouse – now burning millions up the road atop a skyscraper at Ion Storm. Jay Wilbur and Mike Wilson, legendary 'biz' guys, the former now a Henry Kissinger-like figure at Epic Games, the latter heading up Gathering of Developers. Mark Rein, once id president, now also at Epic and credited with the licensing out the *Unreal* engine. American McGee, level designer and the best *Quake* player ever to draw a cheque at id.

All just 'her kids' to the larger-than-life Miss Donna, whose huge hair alone deserves its own TV show. She refuses to be photographed and features in none of the hundreds of photos and press clippings that cover the office walls. Only co-owner John Carmack seems a constant in the pictures. His transformation from shy, mop-haired teen to visionary is simply measured out by slightly longer hair and progressive wardrobe of company game T-shirts and the appearance of a pair of spectacles.

■ John Cash

"ONE TIME I MADE AN INSANE BOT... I MADE HIM ULTRA-AGGRESSIVE AND HIS FAVOURITE WEAPON WAS A CHAINSAW, SO HE NEVER RAN OUT OF AMMO. HE JUST RAN AROUND WILDLY. YOU'D BE SNEAKING THROUGH A CORRIDOR AND YOU'D HEAR HIM REV THE CHAINSAW BEHIND YOU"



The behaviour of the bots has been majestically engineered. Finished units will set a new standard

Deathmatch with the media

Today's newspapers are unlikely to take pride of place, after the tragic massacre of a dozen high-school kids by two of their trenchcoat-wearing peers, the media has its own deathmatch on – and games are in the line of fire. The word early on is that id won't comment for legal reasons. It's already awaiting developments in a lawsuit filed in Kentucky, where it is among 15 companies being sued for $100 million (see **E**72).

More employees start to wander in, although Carmack won't arrive until much later. It turns out that many of the team were fiddling with the test version of the game until 4:00am. They hope to get it on the Net today. Arriving at exactly the wrong time, then, our host, **Graham Devine**, can't hide his stress. The founder of the ill-fated codeshop Trilobyte has joined id to help forge a vision of where its games should go. But for now, he's looking after *Quake III: Arena* – and the likes of **Edge**.

Devine left the UK for six months in America. That was over 12 years ago. He's best known as the designer of *7th Guest* and *11th Hour*, early CD-ROM showcases. Carmack has been a friend since the early '90s. "I'd meet up with John at various shows," Devine says. "He was doing *Doom* when I was doing *7th Guest*; *Quake* when I was doing *11th Hour*. He teased that he was catching up with me in real time."

Devine begins the session with the biggest news of the day. The test version that id was working on so frantically last night is the Macintosh release. In fact, even Linux users will get a taste of *Arena* before id's natural PC constituents. Curiosity has been piqued. Has John Carmack finally had enough of the PC and its 3D drivers? Is the best PC game programmer going to become the saviour of the Mac?

But Carmack isn't here, and besides, the game is running 90 per cent happily on Devine's PC. It looks stunning. Twenty-four-bit maniacs run through curvy, organic corridors and arenas suspended in space; power-ups spin and bob and the game barely drops a frame. The combatants taunt and goad each other, hoist enormous weapons into the air and turn smoothly to the right to get their heads blown off by an incoming rocket. A detached commentator reports when someone new takes the lead.

Quake III: Arena looks like a deathmatch, even when you're up against the bots. Compared to *Half-Life*, it's very old school. But since id first broke the news in August that *QIII* will be deathmatch only, the world has come around to the idea that the AIs could present enough of a challenge to make the singleplayer game interesting for the modem-less. Devine is more strident. "This is a classic singleplayer game," he says, pointing out the inadequacies of conventional firstperson shooters. Games like *Unreal*, *Quake* or *Half-Life* are seen as better because you're constantly exploring new areas. But such games not only sacrifice

■ John Carmack ■ Lead programmer



■ Tim Willits ■ Level designer



■ Paul Steed ■ Polygon artist



■ John Cash ■ AI programmer



speed for graphic density, but also the finer points of fighting.

"Usually you just go from room to room blasting monsters who never seem to know what's coming – despite all the noise just outside the door," jokes Devine. "Here, the artificial intelligence works across the whole environment." In other words, you're in the blue corner, the computer is in the red and there's a rocket launcher somewhere in the middle. And it isn't going to wait for you to get there first.

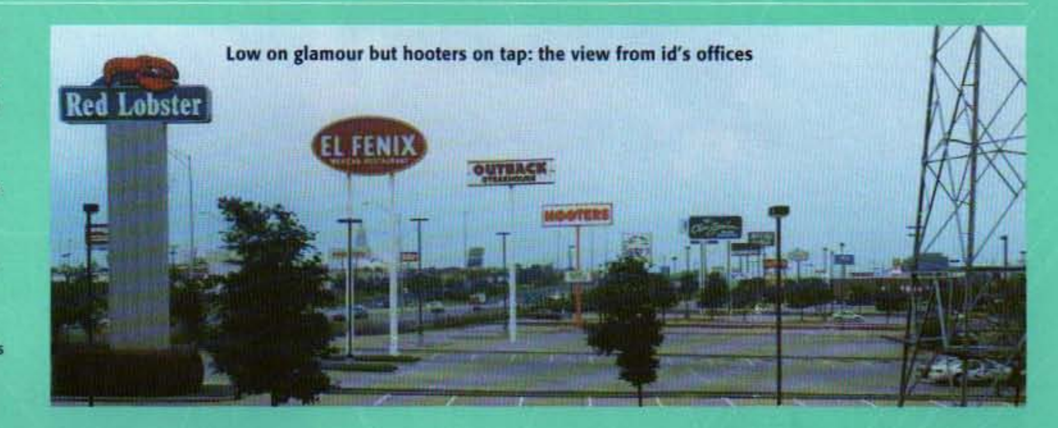
"One time I made an insane bot," reveals **John Cash**, the brains behind the artificial intelligence. "I made him ultra-aggressive and his favourite weapon was a chainsaw, so he never ran out of ammo. He just ran around wildly. You'd be sneaking through a corridor and you'd hear him rev the chainsaw behind you."

Thirtysomething, with a moustache and glasses, he could be programming for a bank except for the fact that he's wearing a T-shirt and is smiling. Cash regularly sneaks into the game as a 'spectator' and watches the bots find the fastest routes to the rocket launchers and quad damage, ripping data right out of the maps. Toning down their omnipotence is much of the challenge.

Field of vision

For instance, the bots now act according to the same rules as the player. In previous *Quakes*, the bad guys had a field of vision of 140 degrees versus the player's 90 degrees, so they'd often see you first. That's gone. The bots now have a concept of the whole environment but they can't see what is going on through walls. Like any human *Quake* player, bots need little more than the deathwish Cash gives them to encourage them to kill. Their personality manifests itself in how they do it.

How low will they let their health or ammo run down before replacing it becomes the priority? Algorithms trading off desire for health against current health status give a bot all the motivation a



Low on glamour but hooters on tap: the view from id's offices

deathmatch needs. Well, nearly all. "They don't have a revenge component right now," admits Cash.

As players progress through the arenas, they'll meet successively harder bots – or characters, as the game's gladiatorial 'Running Man' theme has them. "The characters aren't bad guys," says **Paul Jaquays**, a designer and texture artist currently concocting bios for each of the artist's outlandish creations. "In their own minds, they're all good guys. They were heroes wherever they came from." Softly spoken and sitting in a room covered with his own Rodney Matthews-style fantasy paintings, Jaquays introduces us to the stars. Carmack's new split-body animation system divides each character up into three parts – head, upper body and legs. Each can move individually of the other, resulting in a pseudo-skeletal look that's effective and efficient.

But it's the explosion in the protagonists' complexity that has let the artists run wild. Carmack's decision to focus on multiplayer puts the characters in the spotlight. Once you're familiar with an arena, their movements are the only dynamics in the game. But id's main character artists, Paul Steed and Kenneth Scott, have more than risen to the challenge.

Some characters are familiar faces. The marines from *Quake* and *Doom* make cameo appearances. But what about rollergirl from 'Boogie Nights', coming at you with a nailgun? "Everyone complains about 'skating' characters in firstperson shooters, so I thought why not make a real skating character?" That's **Paul Steed**, polygon artist extraordinaire and all-round joker. If the rest of id come across as geeks-made-good, Paul Steed is their Ferris Beuller. He pumps iron at lunchtime on a huge set of weights in the crowded test corridors. He's insanely confident. "I've had teams of 20 artists before," says Steed, who's worked on *Wing Commander 3* and *4*. "I'm telling you, the way we do it here is the way to do it. There are developers and then there is 'developer concentrate' – just add water!"

Steed loads up a test arena complete with a huge wall-length mirror any starlet would die for. He fires up a little girl on a skateboard doing backflips and various other back-of-a-napkin-made-real creations. Next he shows us his shotgun design, complete with a laser sight. "Why have a sight on a shotgun? It's a joke! That's the point." You somehow feel today's newspapers wouldn't see the funny side.

Next door sits **Kenneth Scott**, who beat off much of the Texan gaming scene when he jumped from Ion Storm to id just four months ago. The texture artist is

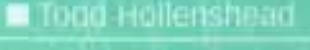
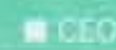
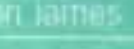
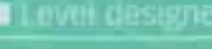
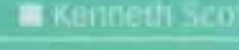








The luminous quad damage icon (top) enables you to inflict four times as much destruction on opponents. When faced with the distinctive blue glow, then (above), it's wise to beat a hasty retreat






■ Todd Hollenshead ■ CEO ■ Brandon James ■ Level designer ■ Kenneth Scott ■ Texture artist













Arena's new split-body animation system, which Carmack is responsible for creating, divides the characters up into three individually moving parts (head, upper body and legs). The results set *QIII:A* apart from its peers

full of praise for Steed. "I feel so guilty, because my job is to make the models look real," Scott says. "When I get models from Paul, they already look so good that my job is really not to ruin them." Scott says it takes him two to three days to fully 'skin' a model and keep up with the prolific Steed. His character skins, which he still paints in the traditional 'unfolded' way, bristle with detail. There is a biker with a pocket pedometer (Scott himself is approaching 1,000,000 steps on his own pedometer unit) and a *Doom* logo on the back of his jacket. Yet the emphasis is on making the textures suitably battle-scarred. "These characters need to look war-torn; they get blown apart and then put back together and sent out again," Scott says. "Ironically, there's no such thing as death in this game."

■ Kenneth Scott

"MY JOB IS TO MAKE THE MODELS LOOK REAL... THESE CHARACTERS NEED TO LOOK WAR-TORN; THEY GET BLOWN APART AND THEN PUT BACK TOGETHER AND SENT OUT AGAIN. IRONICALLY, THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS DEATH IN THIS GAME"

Id's other artists are its owners Kevin Cloud and Carmack's brother Adrian. Like John – who still hasn't arrived by lunchtime – their success has earned them a certain privacy. Yet, id's incredibly hospitable attitude towards visitors (in total contrast to its 'difficult' reputation, and on today of all days) perhaps makes an encounter inevitable. After wandering into one of the meeting rooms for carrot sticks and homous, **Edge** makes small-talk on the importance of vegetables with a quiet, unassuming strawberry snaffler. He doesn't introduce himself, but rather gives the game away when he reveals that id plans to move offices towards the end of the year. "We've gone overboard with wide corridors in the new offices," says the mysterious **Kevin Cloud**. The current offices are as cramped as *Doom*. Architecturally, id is opening up just like its games. But it's hard to imagine the texture of the new place being as rich as this. Nerf guns that fire sponge missiles lie about the place – the remnants of an inter-office war that began when the toys' makers wooed id with a game proposal. John Carmack's antique sword collection hovers on the walls. The company launched here by John and Adrian Carmack and Jon Romero on the back of a little-known game called *Commander Keen* went on to change the industry with its shareware business model, open-ended technology and unparalleled graphics engines. Dozens, if not hundreds, owe id their jobs. Stuff can be moved, but memories can't.

What is definitely *not* on the agenda is expansion. There are only 15 or so staff at id, and it will probably stay that way. Ex-Arthur Anderson consultant, now CEO, **Todd Hollenshead** heads up the company day to day. "Our run-rate is pretty low, since we're not living in a castle," he explains. "For a project to be successful we don't have to sell a whole lot of units." Id's excellent track record means publishers all but pay for the rights to distribute its games. Licensed distributor Activision has probably made back the cost of securing *Quake II*, but the benefit it gained from adding 'id Software' to its release schedule is inestimable. This financially strong developer has no publisher looking over its shoulder – it stumps up its own money and calls all the shots – and that's what keeps it so focused.

"The freedom is not lost on us, but the company really earned it," says Hollenshead. "These guys lived off bread and water for a long time. John Carmack used to walk over three miles through the snow to get to work. No one has ever lavished money on them. They sweated blood and tears to get here."

Black box

A dozen videogame journalists from Europe quickly get to grips with *Arena* on id's programming computers. Little do they know they're being recorded for posterity. At some point John Carmack has entered the building, and he's set up one of the machines to record the movements. Later the game will be scrutinised like a black box for clues in the quest for perfection.

After a few minutes, *Quake III: Arena* plays just like *Quake*. Most of all, the carefully designed arenas seem perfect for deathmatches. As Carmack will say, the graphics soon fade into the background. But for a while, they're breathtaking. Details like the shimmering effects of power-ups are as much a part of the look as the huge curved arches and organic forms. The portal technology is stunning. Walk up to one and some other hazy part of the arena rocks before you like a mystic mirror. Jump through and you're right in there. Level designer **Tim Willits** gestures towards a gentle gradient in the floor. "We have sloping floors built out of curves," he says with pride. "No one has done that before – although it's probably too subtle for anyone to notice."

Willits is a four-year veteran dating back to Romero times. The other level designer, **Brandon James**, has been here almost as long. Their styles – like their personalities – are very different. Willits, a bundle of energy





As id staffers freely admit, the complexity of *QIII:A*'s architecture isn't explicitly apparent at first glance. It's all in the detail...



Retaining the familiar sombre tone was an essential consideration

whose cheerfulness is infectious, plans out his more complicated maps on paper. James, quiet and softly spoken, works intuitively, starting with a central area and channelling players in through asymmetrical spurs. "My maps are smaller, faster, and there's nowhere to hide," James whispers. "Death, destruction..."

Hours spent within the environs of the game give urgency to issues like the relative importance of corridors over big, open rooms, or whether to design around rocket jumping and campers. "We wanted to push ourselves back towards *Doom*," he explains. "Somewhere along the way with the sprawling *Quake* levels we lost that. I'm not saying it's a bad thing, but as the technology gets more advanced, I don't want us to lose sight of the deathmatch." He runs around his arena, hitting the jump pads and sighing 'whee' to himself. Probably id's best *Quake* player, the railgun is James' weapon of choice. "I dunno, it just feels good," he says. "When they explode in the air and there are body parts flying around – it's like fireworks."

What would the various anti-games activists clamouring on CNN make of this man? If he was still in school, he'd wear black and be bullied. Instead, his affinity with machines makes him a star at one of the best software companies in the world.

Cut to the chase

John Carmack stalks into the room, discovers that he's expected to waste five minutes waiting for two French journos who've gone for *le fag*, and he's out again, issuing an instruction to call him when they get back. Partly, you feel, he's nervous. Partly, he's already lost too many hours' sleep today. Mainly, it's that having Carmack explain the intricacies of 3D engine design to this lot is like Virginia Woolf giving quotes on feminism to *The Sun*. It's more or less a waste of time, and he'd rather waste less time. Once, John Carmack was locked in the office without his keys. Rather than phone a colleague, he took one of his swords down from the wall and hacked straight through the front door.

The problem is that Carmack is brilliant. As a 3D coder he is peerless; as an orator, despite a tendency to lose himself in his words, he's compulsive. He downloads in front of you, setting out the agenda like a C program, anticipating every possible question like so many IF/THEN routines. Sometimes he stumbles, approaching a subject from three or four directions: "Things will probably be changing in terms of... When it gets to the point that everyone is... The next major change in overall architectural design will be..." and then he's off, outlining in ten minutes why geometry processing is the future of 3D cards without pausing for breath. If this style makes him instructive, it also renders any transcript of the interview impossibly difficult. **Edge** wonders if his speech will get faster with his engines, as the technology behind them gets even harder to explain.

Carmack is keen to explain what he calls the 'engineering decisions' behind *Quake III: Arena*. Going multiplayer had two key benefits. First, id could create a compelling game and an industry-beating 3D engine in less than two years – something Carmack believes is no longer possible with singleplayer gaming, especially with just 14 staff. Second, it meant this engine could be optimised for deathmatch – the set-piece graphical effects of *Half-Life* and even *Unreal* wouldn't be a consideration. "In the transitions from *Wolfenstein* to *Doom* and to *Quake*, the next game would come out playing around 12 to 15 frames per second on the common machines and up to 25 on the highest specs," Carmack says. "Fifteen frames per second is fine for singleplayer games. You can make things as glorious as you want, because the player will only pass through once. People played *Myst*, which is really just like a slideshow. But in multiplayer, for the first hour you care about the graphics and after that it hardly matters at all."

So Carmack's *QIII* engine is optimised to draw relatively simple environments very quickly. Interestingly, the engine does support more graphically laborious techniques, and Carmack says this means it will only really show its power when the first external licensees come to market. Raven Software is already working on a *Quake III*-powered product, and Electronic Arts is believed to have secured the engine for its upcoming James Bond title. "What we've got is a nearly optimal method of taking advantage of 3D hardware accelerators, but also remaining scaleable for future generations," asserts Carmack. "When people bring out geometry accelerators, we're going to see a significant boost."

He becomes visibly annoyed when **Edge** asks him about the Mac test. "A test is for our benefit, the demo is for the user's benefit!" he implores. "The test is to help us improve our product, it's not trying to sell the game. I know people won't take it like that, but that's how it is. We're going to release the test on the most constrained system first. It's the most rational, logical way to separate our problems from system problems." What Carmack refuses to be drawn on, is the game to follow *Quake III: Arena*. Earlier in the day, Hollenshead got particularly animated when discussing the possibility of *Doom 2000*. And yet it's pretty clear that Carmack would far rather go

Speed demons

What do these techno-jockeys drive at work?

Forget ergonomics and stripped-wood flooring, id's offices are true geek heaven. Like precocious teens' bedrooms, the decor is purely functional or accidental. The money has gone on the important stuff. Each programmer and designer has his own office – almost unheard of in the cubicled world of game development.

Better still, each individual has at least two computers. One is a slow playtester, the other is about the best that money can buy. Pride of place once went to the $200,000 SGI Origin System that was bought with the proceeds of *Quake*. Crunching the maps of *Quake II* like candy, it's showing its age a little with the follow-up.

Day to day, programmers John Cash and Brian Hook work on dual Pentium IIs running at 400MHz, plus dual Pentium Pros for number crunching, while John Carmack switches between his new twin Pentium III workstation and a pre-production G4 Power Mac. The artists also use PCs, running versions of *3D Studio Max*.

Fast processors are needed to handle unoptimised code, and to squash the level maps into a workable size. Between id's killer trio of *Wolfenstein*, *Doom* and *Quake*, map sizes soared as the 3D became more real. It's levelled off now, though. Curved surfaces are computationally intensive rather than big, and it's the characters that have grown in size. A compressed *Wolfenstein* 386 map takes 4K; *Doom* on a Pentium 90 takes 60K; *Quake* on a quad-processor Alpha takes 1Mb; *Quake II* on an SGI Origin System takes 2.5Mb; and SGI Origin System *Quake III* needs 5Mb. Depending on Carmack's next dice roll, the size of environments could soar again. There is also talk of switching development to Macs if the much-hyped OSX operating system cuts the mustard.









Contrary to early reports, switching weapons now takes longer. The idea of John Carmack, this means that there are now more tactics involved in your offensive manoeuvres





Early response to the *QIII* test has been mixed, but it remains a favourite for LAN play (across PCs and Macs) in Edge's offices

■ Graham Devine

deeper into the mathematics of 3D than concern himself with the myriad trivial issues raised by a modern singleplayer game. Id won't stop writing games, however time-consuming they get; Carmack values working at the seam too much to turn id into a 3D-engine shop. So if *Arena* is successful, he'll push to continue the arena route. "We have different people with different opinions," he admits. "I look at my job as providing a park where people can go and enjoy themselves, whereas a lot of classical game designs are more like movies. They're both equally valid but somewhat contradictory in approach."

Whether or not *Quake III: Arena* is a hit, the company's current trajectory chimes with Romero's sentiments on departure. He said id was no longer creating visionary game designs, but rather minimalist vehicles for its engines. Still, id will have gotten *Quake II* and *QIIIA* out by the time Romero has failed to finish *Daikatana* (and he even has the hobbyhorse of id's own technology). Perhaps the answer lies with Devine. No one says it, but you can't help feeling that he's come to id to fill the gap left by Romero.

Devine has marshalled the day excellently, and he seems relaxed enough to end proceedings with a frank chat. "They hired me and told me to design the next game," he says. "They realised they are on a pyramid, with *Quake III: Arena* at the top. Where do you go from there? More polygons?" Despite over a decade in the industry, Devine's love of games remains intact. His visionary, massively multiplayer game *Extreme Warfare* died a death when The Learning Company took over Broderbund, and he must be itching to get a game out. Surely Devine can find a way off the environments have to go," Devine adds. "We have to make the environment part of the game." What interests him are tides, the ebbs and flows of nature, the change that comes over the world when darkness falls, the thawing of snow.

The best reason to visit Dallas is to visit id Software, one of the most inspiring developers in the world. Otherwise, the place is a death trap. **Edge** trundles back towards the airport in what's apparently the only taxi in Texas. The driver abuses his monopoly by watching sitcoms on a portable TV wedged above the gearstick, wired into a car battery. Before getting to the airport, he places three calls on his cell phone, fiddles with his pager, bashes the TV a dozen times, adds eye drops without dropping speed – "allergies," he explains – and veers wildly on and off the freeway to avoid a traffic jam caused by a speeding Corvette flying away from the cops.

"THEY REALISED THEY ARE ON A PYRAMID, WITH *QUAKE III: ARENA* AT THE TOP. WHERE DO YOU GO FROM THERE? MORE POLYGONS? STATIC ENVIRONMENTS HAVE TO GO. WE HAVE TO MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT PART OF THE GAME"

pyramid and out of the desert? Of course, the danger is that Carmack won't forgo his polygons. "Yeah, it's an interesting balance," says Devine in his soft brogue. "My job title is 'designer and scapegoat'." The key idea will be one that appeals to Cloud and the Carmacks, while moving the company away from *Quake*. There isn't any chance of id *not* doing firstperson action games, but there are new directions. "The biggest problem with the game is that we equip people with weapons that have no effect on the environment. Shoot the wall with a rocket and it doesn't disintegrate. Static

"They'll beat him good," he says with a giggle. "Jam their knee in his back real hard." In a neighbouring state, 12 kids are dead. Videogames are in the dock. The driver switches on the radio. Storm warnings. Somewhere out in the desert, tornados rumble towards town.

The future of 3D: John Carmack's Theory of Everything

The Holy Grail of theoretical physics is the Grand Unifying Theory

Instead of today's rag-bag of equations explaining the behaviour of sub-atomic particles, gravity, relativity and magnetism, physicists are searching, seemingly in vain, for an elegant solution for describing them all. Simple solutions to complicated problems appeal to anyone with a mathematical mind. And **John Carmack** is proposing his own unifying theory to sort out the potential nightmare of the upcoming shift to new graphical technologies. But it is politics rather than practicalities that stand in his way. What he called 'the golden age of triangle rendering' (see **E**70) is rapidly drawing to a close. Success so far has come by apeing a Silicon Graphics machine on a ten-quid chip. Carmack recalls that early critics of the texture-mapping polygons taken from Silicon Graphics said it would make every game look the same. "What saved creativity was blended effects," he says. "Instead of relying on the API to do every effect, you composite multiple times through the API." For example, you might texture a car model then apply a light map then bump-mapping and specular effects. By combining simple operations you can make a more complex, attractive visual.

Some upcoming improvements in 3D graphics rely on these methods. Fully dynamic lighting systems with shadows and stencil buffers are already achievable if one targets the best cards alone. And full-texture coverage, enabling artists to forego the crude texture compression of repeated textures for full creative freedom will come with widespread adoption of DVD. "The geometric extension of that is a voxel-based setup where you're dealing with surfaces and analytical definitions," says Carmack. "You say 'I want a hole in that wall' – chip, chip, chip – or 'I want to bevel off this edge'." Carmack explains that it's harder to innovate with geometry. "When all we cared about was the CPU, we had complete freedom to choose whatever algorithms we wanted. But now, if you do brilliant CPU code but you leave 2GigaOps sitting on the table because you're not utilising the 3D accelerator, that's not a good engineering decision." Break away from the existing CPU-does-polygons/card-does-textures partnership, say with voxels, and you throw away almost all your filtering capabilities. But worse still, the CPU/3D-card combo itself is running out of steam because the CPU's bus can't shuffle data into main memory fast enough to keep up with the accelerators' polygon handling or even the CPU's own floating-point processors. "On hardware coming out later this year, you could get a four-times improvement in your triangle rate if you could avoid pumping any vertexes through the CPU," Carmack estimates. Geometry acceleration is therefore a 'no brainer' and it seems the 3D card vendors agree. The trouble is it will produce the biggest upheaval in PC graphics since 3D cards first arrived on the scene. "My current crusade is setting things up for when geometry accelerators are the primary factor," says Carmack. "Instead of pumping polygons through the CPU, you're going to want to de-couple all surfaces from touching it, just the way we have textures now. No current API – not D3D or OpenGL – has what you need to decouple everything. Vertex buffers or display lists are fine for dealing with static geometry, but in games we've got obvious cases where the geometry cannot currently be accelerated." But what worries him isn't so much what other programmers decide is best – NURBS, skeletal systems, voxels or whatever – but that by trying to cater for everyone, any API will be fundamentally hamstrung. 3D graphics in games could be set back years. Carmack says his research led him to realise that all new techniques are special cases of what he terms "a general compositing architecture for vertexes." In other words, just as almost anything can be done with textures, so programmers should be able to implement their preferred engines through multiple API calls. "All of these things people are talking about – curved surfaces, subdivision surfaces, morphed frames, higher goal skeletal models – you can synthesise them if this one simple operation, the act of compositing on the vertex path, can be added to the API. The current geometry pipelines do not have any way to composite operations," he says. "They're fixed function. You feed it in one end and you get it out the other, and there's no chance for looping or modifying through there. I just wish I had more time on all these things because this is important," he adds quickly. "The nice thing is that everyone who is presented with it understands it, but it *is* in kind of a different direction. I really need to sell Microsoft on it. Everybody listens to John Carmack's advice, but it's another thing to make a scary hardware architectural decision for the future based on what one game developer thinks."



E3

The biggest videogame expo of all time has come and gone. **Edge** reports from the greatest show on earth

Photography: **Jude Edginton**



Think of Los Angeles, and images of Hollywood glitz and tanned Beverly Hills torsos come to mind. In reality, though, much of this pocket of America is a veritable scuzz pit, crawling with degenerates and ne'er-do-wells against a backdrop of grime and half-realised ambition. The last E3 before the millennium, then, provided some solace to LA visitors seeking straightforward pleasures such as videogaming – even if that meant occasional suffocation from the unpalatable glitz so beloved of trade shows.

Of the claimed 1,900 or so new titles on show, precious few stoked the fires of attendees to the point where cries of 'revolution' could be heard. On the whole, in fact, this year's event represented more of an evolution than it did rewriting of any rules. If you looked hard enough, however, it was possible to pick out some genuine gems among the many fake jewels fashioned out of paste. Refreshingly, a fair number of these stood proud on Sega's sprawling stand, which accounts for the extended coverage afforded to Dreamcast games in this section. Nintendo and Sony simply have to take second and third places respectively in **Edge**'s pick of this year's E3 console crop.

SEGA@E3

It's already been said elsewhere this issue, but it's worth reiterating: Sega's presence at E3 was the kind of boost the company needed merely four months before the western launch of its promising 128bit format. A triumphant event for a company in the balance, then.



■ Showgoers were drawn, zombie-like, to Sega's wealth of playable Dreamcast units



■ If anything will sell Dreamcast into the US, it's sports games. E3 had some top examples



■ Sega's Dreamcast lightgun may have been absent, but steering wheels were in full effect



■ *Shenmue* was one of Sega's failures at E3. Two half-hearted game sections left many cold

NINTENDO@E3

Nintendo may have presented its games on monitors that did not flatter the resolution its current console is capable of generating, but the company had enough creativity in the bag – mostly courtesy of UK codeshop Rare – to hold its own.



■ The N64's showing was surprisingly diverse, although old hits such as *Tetris* also appeared



■ The company's *Pokémon* conviction was unshakeable, if still unproven in the west



■ Nintendo's *Perfect Dark* section saw more traffic than just about any other at the event



■ The theme of Nintendo's largest dedicated display area was hardly anything of a shock



PC@E3

Of all the formats at E3, it was the PC, unsurprisingly, which offered up the most diverse range of new titles. Which is not to say that computer gamers had the cream of the crop – there was as much, if not more, repugnant sludge to trawl through in this sector as there was anywhere else.



■ Psygnosis' stand, showcasing the likes of *Drakkan*, proved a draw to dedicated PC fans



■ The UK's biggest publisher wheeled out Lara yet again. Talk about a flagship icon...



■ Electronic Arts' stand: big, but showcasing a range of titles shockingly thin on innovation



■ The burgeoning Infogrames showed little to match the scale of its much-vaunted ambition



SONY@E3

With probably the most underwhelming stand at the show, Sony offered updates of previously tested formulae – *Um Jammer Lammy*, *Crash Rashing*, *Spyro 2*, a re-engineered *Gran Turismo* – but couldn't resist a rather low-key presentation of its PlayStation 2 technology.



■ Ooh, a spangly pyramid. What delights lie within? Oh. No new PlayStation 2 demos, then



■ A very rare shot from E3: the playable PS2 *Gran Turismo* demo left totally unattended



■ *Gran Turismo 2* was Sony's biggest title, but many attendees' expectations were too high



■ RPG-heads eager to get to grips with *Final Fantasy VIII* trooped to Sony's themed area

SEGA BEGINS TO LIVE DREAM



Those seeking to knock Sega's return to the massmarket fray were sorely disappointed after E3. While it wasn't quite a case of 'Long Live Dreamcast', the console's assault was vigorous enough to make even the most sceptical observer realign their scope. If nothing else, the persistent optimism of any Sega staff proved remarkably infectious. One of the strongest western-launch software line-ups a console has ever been blessed with helped foster a sense of well-being, too.

With strong sports titles in the form of Sega's own NBA and NFL licenses, and the impressively lunatic *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing* from Midway (which scored highly with many developers attending E3), US tastes were well catered for. However, those seeking richer flavoured gameplay would have been ill-served were it not for Sega Europe and its promising collection of 1.5-party titles. Every dog has its day: E3 was definitely Dreamcast's.









READY 2 RUMBLE BOXING

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: In-house

Heating up memories of Nintendo's *Punch Out!!* series, Midway's ode to cartoon-styled pugilism was a huge hit with all who joined the queues at E3 to sample it. Featuring an outrageous gathering of contenders, from overweight baldies to afro-bearing skinny white guys – all animated with suitable characterisation – the game demands a surprisingly skillful approach for successful play. Certainly, compared to Midway's other, more pedestrian offerings (*Hydro Thunder*, *Mortal Kombat Gold* and *NFL Blitz 2000*), *Ready 2 Rumble*'s quality is all the more remarkable. Its Euro release before Christmas promises much.







Ready 2 Rumble's not quite the simple pleasure you might assume it to be – tactics have to be employed as much as reflexes. But rest assured, it's all a hoot





TRICK STYLE

■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Developer: Criterion Studios

Something of a favourite with **Edge**, and not just because it premiered within these pages, Criterion's hoverboard racer has the makings of a classic. The characterisation and animation system (which combines traditional and physics-based methods) are sublime; the tracks are inspired, littered with opportunities to perform stunts; and the game's structure has been skillfully lifted from Nintendo and Rare's hits. Even in the unoptimised-PC-port form it journeyed as to E3, *Trick Style* ensured several chins hit the floor.







Speed, skill and the opportunity to show off might be gameplay staples, but combined with a stunning animation system *Trick Style* has a winning formula



ARMADA

■ Publisher: Sega
■ Developer: Metropolis Digital Inc.





Developed in the US by little-known outfit Metropolis Digital Inc., *Armada* is a massively multiplayer title targeted at promoting the online capabilities of Dreamcast. The game's uninspiring visuals coupled with its less-than-immediate appeal meant that the E3 demo pods were left unmolested by most attendees. Pitched as a space-based RPG, *Armada*'s qualities may only become clear after extended play.

TOY COMMANDER

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: No Cliché

While developer No Cliché may once have part-created the PC classic *Alone in the Dark* (under the guise of *Adeline*), its latest offspring is of a rather different mould. As its name implies, *Toy Commander* places you in charge of an army of children's playthings, such as tanks, planes and trucks. These must be used to complete a number of missions, battled out in superscaled home settings, much like Codemasters' *Micro Machines* series (albeit in full 3D). If nothing else, *Toy Commander* boasted one of E3's more original game concepts, although general competition in that quarter was shambolic.







While not wholly original, 'The Borrowers' concept is used here to good effect. Controlling a variety of toy vehicles, you embark on a series of tactical missions

METROPOLIS STREET RACER

■ Publisher: Sega
■ Developer: Bizarre Creations



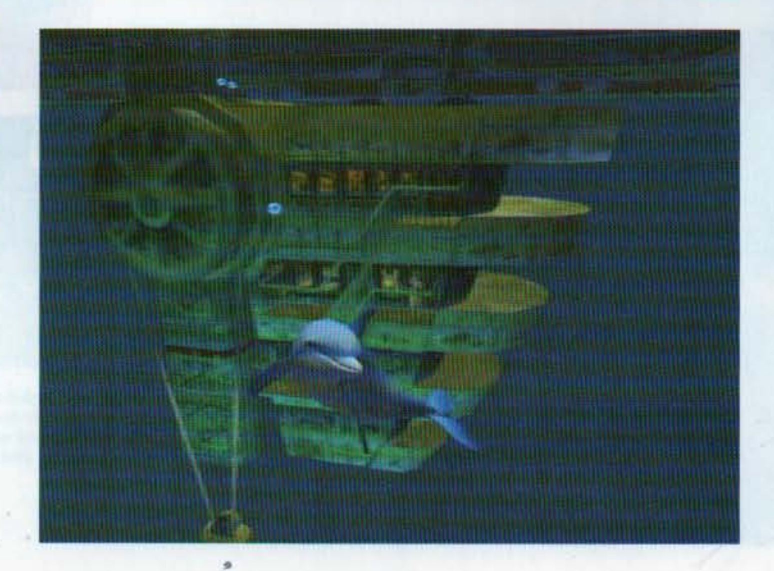


Metropolis (see **E**72) suffered a damaging appearance at E3 following the departure of lead coder Matt Birch just prior to the show. Sadly, Bizarre Creations simply didn't have time to patch together a solid demo of its hotly tipped title, meaning that many pundits simply wandered away part way through a lap. Sega Europe may be well advised to delay its release in the name of quality over quantity.

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Appaloosa Interactive

Having quietly disappeared from Sega Europe's current release schedule, Appaloosa's new *Ecco* title was nonetheless running as a realtime demo at the show. Although suffering from a faltering framerate, the rolling demo's eponymous aquatic hero was beautifully animated. The scenery and action that was within the 'fog' limit was moderately detailed, leaving **Edge** gasping for a chance to actually experience the game. Best of all, Sega has revealed that audio ace Tim Follin has been enlisted to score the music.







Although Sega's aquatic friend hardly made a splash, it certainly caused a few ripples. Once up to speed, it may aid Dreamcast's expansion into new market segments



NFL 2000

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Visual Concepts

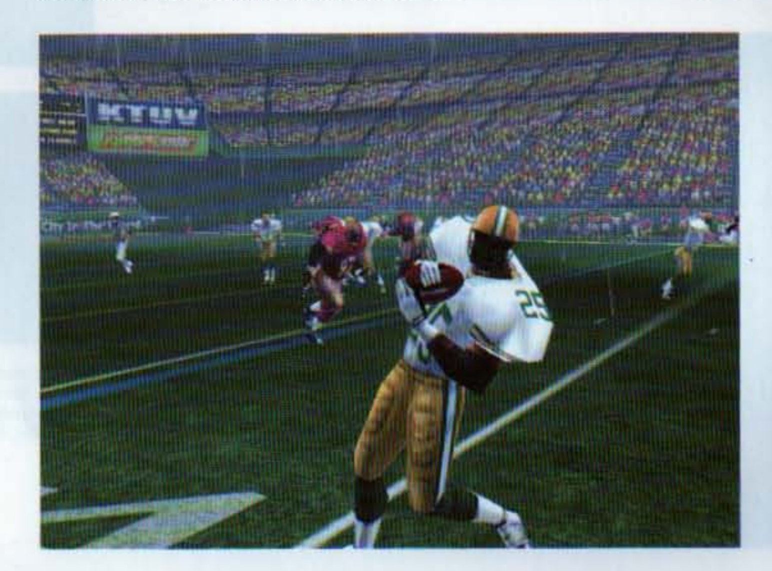
'It's just like watching television!' was the cry that tumbled forth from the lips of countless onlookers as Sega's key American launch title played. Okay, so the claim may not be entirely true, but the crucial US football market should be well sated by the hi-res action on offer in *NFL 2000* (still a working title), which reiterates the desirability of lucrative game licences for Sega's new console. Statistics-wise, the armchair pros should be well satisfied, with over 1,500 motion-captured animations created with the assistance of 16 real-life players to gorge themselves on.







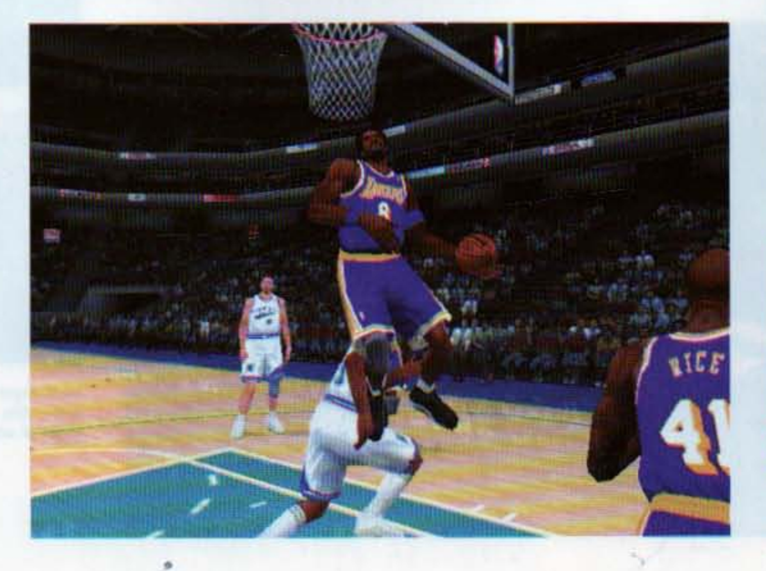
Acclaim's hi-res N64 sports titles have long indicated the genre's next-gen potential. Sega's game (and Acclaim's own forthcoming *QBC 2000* for Dreamcast) shows the progress now being made. Expect Sega's European football title to impress



NBA 2000

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Visual Concepts

Slightly less impressive than its American football stablemate, Sega's basketball game (*NBA 2000* being another working title) nonetheless ran at a steady 60 frames per second and presented an equally vast number of motion-captured movements. In line with their contemporaries, the Dreamcast sports titles come fully loaded with every conceivable option imaginable, from customisable players to NBA-coached AI. Coming next season: virtual drug abuse scandals…



HARDCORE HEAT

■ Publisher: ASC

■ Developer: CRi





Previously tagged *Buggy Heat*, CRi's racer is to receive a US release by ASC Games under the lengthy tag of *TNN Motorsports HardCore Heat 4x4*. The E3 version appeared just about complete, and offered a suitably rough driving experience over a selection of surfaces. It's unlikely to overshadow *Sega Rally 2* in the west, but could prove another interesting test for Dreamcast's committed push towards connectivity.

E3 IN THE EYES OF…

■ Jez San

■ Argonaut



What was the game of the show for you?
There wasn't any one game at the show that 'made it' for me, but I did like *DK64* and *Tokyo Extreme Racing*. And, of course, *Croc 2*, *Red Dog* and *Alien Resurrection* were looking pretty fine.

Which publisher did you think had the most impressive line-up overall?
Sega, because they caught us all off guard! The Dreamcast stuff was shockingly, unexpectedly, amazingly good. Pre-E3, everyone had written them off as doing too little too late, but they turned up at the show with some really good games.

Whose presence – Sega's, Nintendo's or Sony's – impressed you the most?
They all had a good show. Sony continued to dominate, but its product line-up is looking a bit samey. Nintendo had some great new releases but everyone is waiting for more news of its next system. Sega did the best. Not because its stand was fantastic, or that the games were outstanding, but, I think, purely because of the surprise that their launch line-up looks so solid.

What did you make of Sony's rather muted PlayStation 2 display?
The demos were good, but nothing new. They were extremely impressive when we first saw them in March after only three weeks' work (we were told). At E3, they'd had five times as long and some people expected them – perhaps unreasonably – to be five times as good. I think Sony's kit is very powerful, but it definitely needs better demos next time they show it publicly.

What did you think of the trends among software at E3?
I'm so glad to see that many of the PC games at the show were unoriginal firstperson shooters; it leaves room for the rest of us to do something original and fun!

What were your overall feelings as you came away from the event?
I thought that the industry is eagerly awaiting the new systems but has got itself in a bit of a rut with many samey games. I was glad to see so much optimism about the 'next round'. Everyone believes our industry is going to grow even further.



Sports-crazy US gamers will doubtless flock to the proliferation of Dreamcast sims



FIGHTING FORCE 2

■ Publisher: TBA ■ Developer: Core Design

Core's vastly improved PlayStation title *Fighting Force 2* (related to its predecessor in little more than name) is also in development for Dreamcast. **Edge** was treated to a behind-closed-doors viewing of the title, which looks likely to leave the underwhelming *Blue Stinger* (see **E**71) floundering in its wake. These shots come from the PlayStation incarnation, which plays something like an industrial *Tomb Raider* with (very) heavy weaponry. Sniper rifles being somewhat *de rigueur* at the moment, one has been included, although it's no match for *GoldenEye*'s. All told, though, *FF2* is shaping up impressively.







Core's unconfirmed Dreamcast version of *Fighting Force 2* is an improvement over these already impressive PlayStation shots, with 60fps, new textures and new models

VIGILANTE 8: SECOND OFFENCE

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: In-house

Activision's first Dreamcast title is to be *Vigilante 8: Second Offence*, the follow-up to its popular retro-styled car-combat series. When the original made the journey from console to computer, storyline fell by the wayside, and Activision appears keen to follow this trend: *Second Offence* makes no apologies for balls-out action taking precedence over depth. Although no paradigms are being set, the gameplay benefits immensely from the steady 60fps update afforded by Sega's hardware.







Multiplayer gaming will be a crucial aspect of the title, as will more realistic scenery, much of which will be totally destructible



NINTENDO PLAYS IT SAFE

It was another strong showing for the Kyoto-based videogames giant this year – perhaps one of the best ever, in fact. Aside from the hardware announcement (see News), Rare's *Perfect Dark*, *Jet Force Gemini* and *Donkey Kong 64* stole most of the attention for Nintendo, contested only by a substantial corner dedicated to LucasArts' *Episode One Racer* (see p88), which although a good use of the powerful licence, was not the firstrate game most US attendees seemed intent on proclaiming. Away from the many Game Boy and *Pokémon*-related products, there were some promising titles. *Ridge Racer 64* blasted by impressively every few minutes on the stand's giant screen, while anyone after *Res Evil 2* was required to visit Capcom's booth. The Nintendo Sports range, introduced at last year's E3, even offered basketball and baseball in the form of *Kobe Bryant in NBA Courtside 2* and *Ken Griffey Jr's Slugfest*, which reflected Nintendo's sound health.





The Far Sight weapon (top) allows you to target and shoot enemies through walls. Fear not, the multiplayer aspects haven't been ignored

PERFECT DARK

■ Publisher: Rare ■ Developer: In-house

Shown in more unremitting surroundings (designed by members of the *PD* team) than last year's inconspicuous black-clothed mini cinema booth, *Perfect Dark* was easily one of the most played products at the show, and arguably headed Nintendo's extensive N64 line-up both in terms of quality and promise.

Much has changed since **Edge** last played the game over a year ago. Naturally, the graphics have further improved; stylish cut-scenes abound (an alleged influence of *Zelda*); enemies now communicate with each other; new weapons were showcased (including a thermal-based gun which allows you to shoot through walls at anyone hiding or adopting a sniping position – in essence, it's similar to something seen in Schwartzenegger action flick 'Eraser'); projectile blood features; mission structure is in place; and Expansion Pak support is assured. Most of the current animation is still taken from *GoldenEye*, but already the 25 per cent that is new illustrates the team's commitment to move significantly on from its previous N64 outing. But the most surprising announcement is the game's compatibility with the Game Boy Camera allowing you to map your (or your friends') face on to a featureless head for multiplayer laughs. The camera attaches via the N64's GB Pak and details such as hair colour and style, as well as face and body shape, will all be selectable in the final version. It's a fantastic feature, and ironically something former SCEI CEO Teruhisa Tokunaka talked about after the NGPS announcement.

Other novelties include major additions to the multiplayer mode, which, in addition to the game's main levels, also includes favourite arenas from *GoldenEye*. More interestingly still, is the possibility of playing as part of a team of, say, 'grey' aliens facing six dataDyne agents. You can instruct your team members at any time, although these are sufficiently intelligent to go about their business, looking out for each other and progressing through the level of their own accord. An extension of this is the fourplayer mode which Rare is hoping will allow another four CPU-controlled entities to join the game for an eightplayer session.

Even when surrounded by fellow enthusiastic *Perfect Dark*ers in the absurdly noisy atmosphere of E3, standing up with a bagful of press packs doing its best to bend your legs, Rare's ambitious title manages to prove utterly captivating. Which, given the arduous testing conditions, can only be good news.

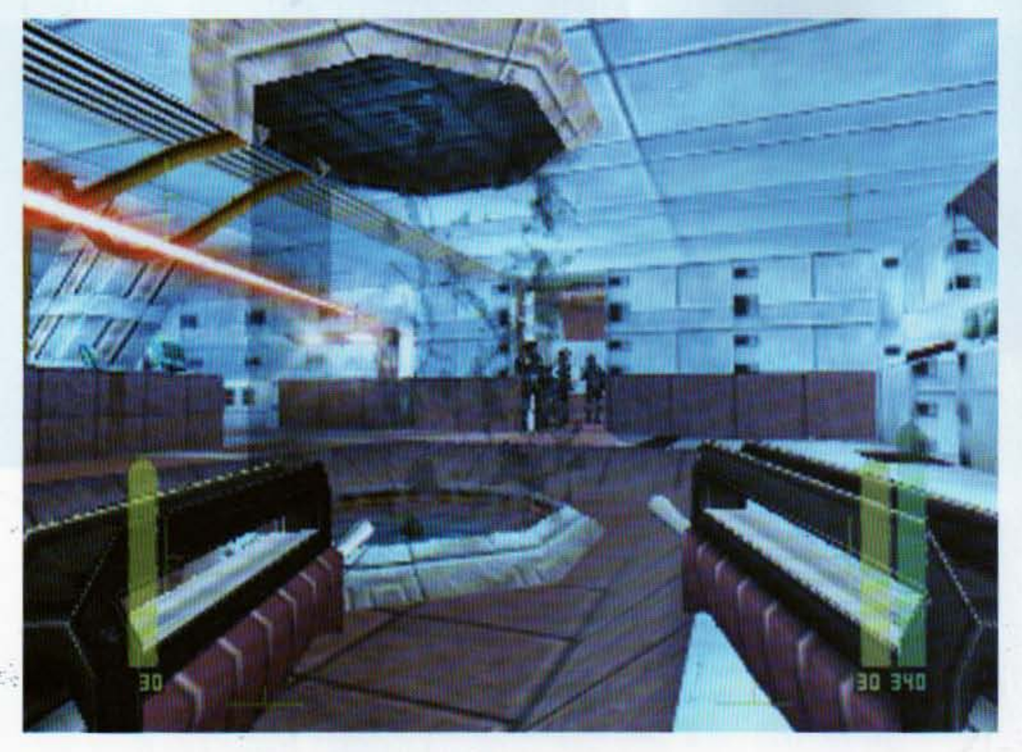
A year on since its first unveiling, the potential for something revolutionary remains, and **Edge** impatiently awaits the game's planned December release, which, according to a team member, is currently looking perfectly attainable.







Exuding more atmosphere in an E3 demo than most firstperson shooters manage to include in an entire game, *PD* looks set to make as big an impact on this popular genre as its predecessor did two years ago











JET FORCE GEMINI

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Rare

The playable demo unveiling most of *JFG*'s weapons was certainly evolutionary, despite being specifically designed for the show, and hence not a true representation of the final game. Still, the superb visuals, lighting effects (only bettered by *DK64*) and old-school gameplay values were confirmed, even if most people failed to see the references to past classics as well as the plethora of mini-games and various multiplayer options (such as twoplayer cooperative, CPU-controlled adversaries, capture-the-flag scenarios and hover racing, for example) that should enhance the finished cart come August.







Proving that sometimes old ideas are the best, *JFG*'s retro-inspired gameplay proves extremely satisfying. Shooting alien ant-like beings has never been quite as enjoyable









DONKEY KONG 64

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Rare

Promising many innovative gameplay touches and extensive use of the game's five characters in order to complete the adventure, *DK64* should certainly impress *Banjo-Kazooie* devotees. But both *PD* and *JFG* excite more than Rare's latest progeny. To be fair, technically *DK64* shines, with some wonderful lighting and adventurous textures. However, the price of all this gloss is the obligatory use of the Expansion Pak, which NOA plans to bundle with the game on November 22, retailing at just under $50.







There are some genuinely comic moments in *DK64*, but until **Edge** can sit down for a more in-depth look at Rare's latest project, it would appear more at home with kids



ARMORINES

■ Publisher: Acclaim
■ Developer: Probe





Based on the *Turok 2* engine, Probe's insectoid-blasting fest looked particularly interesting, certainly for a firstperson shooting experience. Much is expected from the AI, which currently promises to be some of the best yet seen in this oversubscribed genre. A fourplayer deathmatch is supported by twoplayer cooperative options, and, of course, Expansion and Rumble Pak compatibility is on the cards. Expect it in time for Christmas.

ETERNAL DARKNESS

■ Publisher: Nintendo
■ Developer: Silicon Knights



From the people who brought you *Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain* (not *Soul Reaver*) for the PlayStation comes a medieval slash 'em up horror-filled action RPG. Although obviously early, playing this was not exactly what you might call a revelation – while graphically competent, animation and, more importantly, gameplay failed to impress. Still, the final game is not expected until early next year, so there's time left to remedy matters.

WORLD DRIVER CHAMPIONSHIP

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Boss Game Studios

From the maker of the likeable *Top Gear Rally*, *World Driver Championship* looked very promising. As an aspiring driver, you must progress on to more powerful machinery based on GT versions of real cars. In total, 30-odd vehicles and many more tracks are claimed to make the final version. Currently, Boss Studios' attempt at *Gran Turismo* may look the part, but the cars carry too much momentum into corners and fail to respond like the true racing machines they purport to be, preferring to oversteer like lorries. It's unlikely that this problem will be solved in time for its imminent US release.







Sadly, most US developers seem unable to properly recreate car dynamics in racing games, robbing products of their potential by turning them into something unplayable

E3 IN THE EYES OF...

■ Les Edgar
■ industry guru

Which publisher did you think had the most impressive line-up overall?
I think EA had a great depth of product across most genres. Perhaps this reflects the increasing competition from many publishers trying to take a slice of the sports pie.
Biggest disappointment of the show?
If it had been better planned, I could have seen 'Episode One: The Phantom Menace'.
Whose presence – Sega's, Nintendo's or Sony's – impressed you the most?
Sega was strong, Nintendo weak, and Sony about where I expected them to be. Some people are ruling Dreamcast out, but after the show, I think it deserves a second look.
What did you think of the trends among software at E3?
Sequels and licences dominated. When done well they're brilliant, but when poorly done, they're an excuse for lack of creativity.
What were your overall feelings as you came away from the event?
It was bigger and glitzier, but somehow not as interesting as I had hoped it would be.

EXCITEBIKE 64

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Left Field

Shown only as a rolling demo, this 64bit update of the classic NES game displayed more potential than Kemco's *Hyper Bike* and EA's *Supercross 2000* put together. The graphics and animation routines are impressive, a complex but authentic set of dynamics is clearly evident, and racing occurs in stadium-based tracks as well as in mountainous and dusty desert-inspired terrain. Arcade action is guaranteed, with massive jumps featuring in all tracks shown at E3. In addition, a track editor is promised, as is one-to-fourplayer simultaneous riding. The title is currently looking at an end-of-year US release.





One of the pleasant surprises inhabiting Nintendo's substantial stand, if it plays as well as it promises to, *Excitebike 64* might just turn out to be an entertaining ride



PC GAMES: BUSINESS AS USUAL

If an infinite number of monkeys started designing games on an infinite number of workstations, it's difficult to believe that they'd come up with the amount of firstperson-viewed action games evident at E3. Where a year ago the realtime strategy game was the cloneshops' genre of choice, 1999 faces a mess of *Quake*-alikes. Now that *Half-Life* has explored and proved the potential of what was once perceived to be such an unmitigated no-brainer of a game style, and the licensing of 3D engine technology has become commonplace rather than out of the ordinary, the floodgates have opened: the LA Convention Centre was awash with the things, each desperately clinging to its own little spin on what has gone before. Cutting a swathe through them was not an easy task, but it was a rewarding one nevertheless, for beyond the pipe-cloggage lay a raft of titles whose developers are exploring the freedom the PC market affords, not simply exploiting its expectations.







TEAM FORTRESS 2

■ Publisher: Sierra ■ Developer: Valve

Valve was one of the few brave enough to show real early code at E3. Present in no more than a technical form, *TF2* demonstrated the exciting future for multiplayer gaming.

Based on a system of cooperative team play, the Valve programmers demonstrated that speech input delivered by a team leader could be perfectly lip-synched on to characters in the game while at the same time overlaying environmental effects dictated by the player's current position within a level. Data transfer rates and the viability of Internet-only games has much to prove, but few others were able to show such ambition.







You want cutting-edge gameplay *and* graphical excesses? If you didn't already know, Valve is the PC codeshop to watch...

INTERSTATE '82

■ Publisher: Activision

■ Developer: In-house





One of **Edge**'s most eagerly anticipated PC projects in recent years, *I'82* did not quite live up to lofty expectations at the show. Its borrowed 3D engine lacks the sparkle of dedicated poly-pushers, and instead of the grittily realistic visuals showgoers rightly anticipated, somewhat 'artificial' imagery took their place. Gameplay indications at E3 remained positive, however.

MESSIAH

■ Publisher: Interplay ■ Developer: Shiny Entertainment

Tucked away on Interplay's modest stand, *Messiah* took this year's award for most-improved game. While still not perfectly slick, the Shiny-developed thirdperson adventure looked far more impressive than it had on previous outings, and was clearly far more than a technology demonstration.

The game premise is similar to Infogrames' *Omikron*, where players possess characters they meet in the game and use their body as a vehicle to move through the levels. The angel that represents the gamer's true character is a typical Shiny invention – eccentric and out of place in its environment, creating both a stronger bond with the player and definitive branding for the game. This is still far from finished, but definitely back on course.







Earlier outings for Shiny's much-vaunted *über*project have proved disappointing, but the distinctive *Messiah* shone at E3











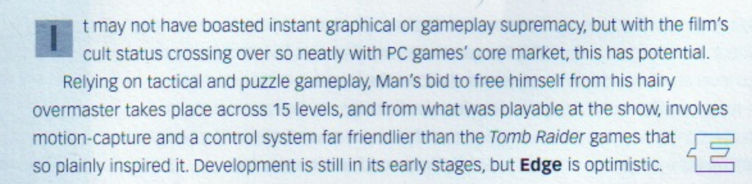
Using the same engine as *Kingpin* – and the same lack of moral values – *Fortune* is set to kick up another stink

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Xatrix

While Activision wonders nervously about the effect *Kingpin* is about to have on the game-censorship debate, developer Xatrix is busy working on the publisher's next headache. Shown nervously behind closed doors, *Soldier of Fortune* is a firstperson mercenary game with a similar emphasis on graphical gore and moral ambiguity. Here, amputations are swiftly performed courtesy of a single well-aimed bullet, while blood flows liberally and corpses wriggle convincingly if repeatedly prodded by a high number of Uzi 9mm bullets. 'Ban this sick filth!' – coming again soon to a tabloid near you.





PLANET OF THE APES

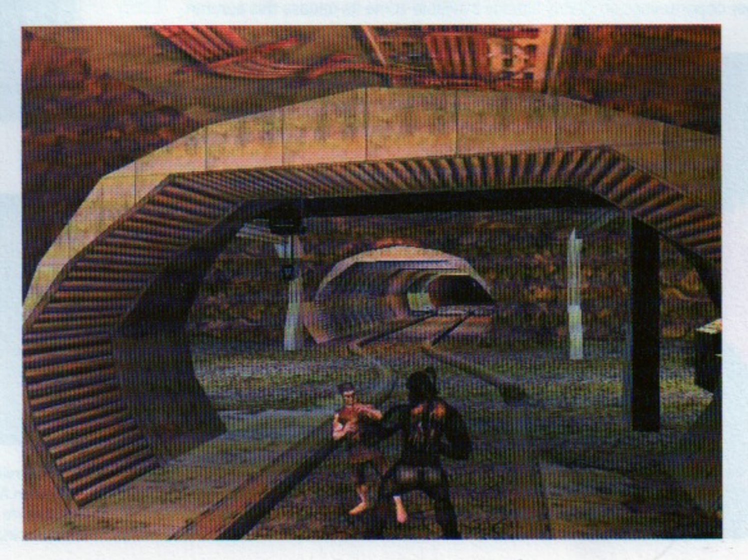
■ Publisher: Fox Interactive ■ Developer: In-house

It may not have boasted instant graphical or gameplay supremacy, but with the film's cult status crossing over so neatly with PC games' core market, this has potential.

Relying on tactical and puzzle gameplay, Man's bid to free himself from his hairy overmaster takes place across 15 levels, and from what was playable at the show, involves motion-capture and a control system far friendlier than the *Tomb Raider* games that so plainly inspired it. Development is still in its early stages, but **Edge** is optimistic.



Fox's *Planet of the Apes* made some effort to present the less-ugly face of licensed game content at 1999's E3



E3 IN THE EYES OF…

■ Peter Molyneux

■ Lionhead Studios



What was the game of the show for you?
Probably Relic's *Homeworld*. I saw it last year and it was looking good; now more polish has been added it looks like being an amazingly playable game. Even more impressive is the fact it's Relic's first game.

Which publisher did you think had the most impressive line-up overall?
All the publishers seemed to have impressive stands, good products and rumours of great things shown behind closed doors.

It was interesting that EA's stand rivalled even Sony's, Nintendo's and Sega's. Eidos seemed to have a massive line-up of products. Activision had some interesting products. Overall, EA's product seemed to bowl everyone over the most.

Biggest disappointment of the show?
No surprises here – it's the sheer number of sequels on show. You do begin to wonder where the new wave of original titles are going to come from.

Whose presence – Sega's, Nintendo's or Sony's – impressed you the most?
Sega had a surprisingly impressive line-up of products, but was overshadowed by the new Nintendo machine rumours and the muted PS2. Sony won the biggest inflatable-character award, and best party, I sort of got the feeling that Sony was holding a huge amount of stuff back. Nintendo's 'Star Wars' products look good and its stand was impressive.

What did you make of Sony's rather muted PlayStation 2 display?
A predictable PlayStation 2 showing. There's no way it was going to make a lot of noise about the machine, probably because it had little in the way of original demos to show.

What did you think of the trends among software at E3?
The sheer quality of games in development is both terrifying and amazing. This must be very scary indeed for the new development teams; the efforts they will have to go to to create a hit game are almost impossibly high.

What were your overall feelings as you came away from the event?
Overall my impression was one of fear. There are loads of sequels, incredible quality, masses of licensed properties and famous game designers coming up with really good concepts (*Freelancer* from Chris Roberts being the best). All this means the stakes are just getting incredibly high.

More than ever before we all need to work together to make the huge successes we all want.









There's nothing here to graphically astound, but, like the ancient *Alter Ego*, *The Sims* relys on depth, not visual elegance, to relay a different playing experience

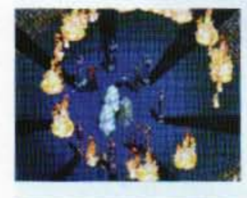
THE SIMS

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: Wil Wright

Sim City creator Wil Wright's new game was one of the few at the show to wade too far into genuinely innovative waters. *The Sims* is a person-based strategy game where everyday objectives such as work, love and marriage are your objectives as you guide your modern-day little computer person through various recognisable social minefields.

Scripted elements will feature, but its aim to encompass human behaviour is a world away from *Sim City's* urban planning. If its ambition is realised, it could be one of the first 'emotive' games. The cynical may already be writing it off as a glorified Tamagotchi.









Bitmap images lead the way in what could easily be one of the PC's most intriguing action RPGs realised to date

NOX

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: Westwood Studios

The legacy of *Gauntlet* lives on, it seems, and Westwood's *Nox* is its latest modern-day exponent. An isometric action RPG, the game uses an admirable line-of-sight system which closes level environments in on players and allows the freedom of the overhead perspective to be coupled with firstperson set-piece level design. As well as a variety of monsters to overcome, magic spells are required to defeat more powerful enemies. Designed primarily with multiplayer games in mind, hopefully Westwood won't waste the singleplayer opportunities so clearly already available come its release this autumn.



E3 IN THE EYES OF...

■ Dave Perry

■ Shiny Entertainment



What was the game of the show for you?
It had to be *Giants* from Planet Moon Studios. Those guys are working night and day to deliver a truly new and creative game. The artwork and scenes are breathtaking.

Whose presence – Sega's, Nintendo's or Sony's – impressed you the most?
I know I'm biased, but I was told by many people that Interplay had the best line-up. Many games slipped last year, but in 1999-2000 they will be releasing many major titles. Sega had the most aggressive presence. That said, it was a bit of a snow job as there were so many duplicate monitors showing the same stuff. I personally loved Midway's boxing game. Nintendo had an impressive stand with all the 'Star Wars' stuff, but I'd kinda seen everything already. *Perfect Dark* was sweet. Sony was big and bold, but I enjoyed the awards show more than the stand.

Biggest disappointment of the show?
I had hoped so see something on the new Nintendo handheld.

What did you make of Sony's rather muted PlayStation 2 display?
It was just there to annoy Sega. I think you'll be amazed by the display they put on next year.

What did you think of the trends among software at E3?
I am seeing more original stuff and less licensed stuff. That's good. (*Black and White* is a great example.) I am also seeing more creative stuff than usual – that is a *great* trend.

What were your overall feelings as you came away from the event?
Hell, it's always fun to be paid to play new games while being handed free beer.



Long-serving gamers may draw parallels between *Nox* and the classic *Faerytale Adventure*. If it draws some of the right influences, this could become a cult classic



THEME PARK WORLD

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: Bullfrog

While the showfloor is never the best place to assess a new management game, there was something about *Theme Park World* that stood out immediately. The game bridges the gap between abstract management of your park, and the experience of actually taking part on the ground. The ability to move from the overview to firstperson is not strictly new, but the effect has never been so well realised as it is here. If Bullfrog can ensure that the system brings tangible gameplay benefits to the gamer – and the game promises much – one of the last remaining bastions of 2D presentation may be about to fall.



It may have lost staff left, right and centre in recent times, but it seems that Bullfrog has retained a sense of style and understanding of gameplay mechanics to ensure it success into 2000



RALLY MASTERS

■ Publisher: Gremlin ■ Developer: Digital Illusions

It doesn't happen very often, but one of the best things about seeing games early in their development cycle is the potentially enriching situation of bumping into them a little further down the road towards completion, and witnessing some major improvement. This is exactly what happened to **Edge** when it dropped by Gremlin's booth to have a look at Sweden's most promising rally game. The handling is now fantastic, easily matching *Colin McRae Rally* for playability. Look out for this one, rally fans.





Just a very conservative example of the kind of race-prepared machines you can expect from Digital Illusions' highly promising rally simulator coming in October



E3 IN THE EYES OF...

■ Gary Penn
■ DMA Design



What was the game of the show for you?
Um Jammer Lammy was funny – and so was Sega's *Seaman: The Forbidden Pet*; *Mario Golf* was fun; Activision's *Spider-Man* looked like it might be fun; Midway's *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing* had some funky spots.

Many 'moments' were to be found all around, but there was no conveniently malleable lump I could put on a pedestal and label 'firm favourite'.

Which publisher did you think had the most impressive line-up overall?
There were mixed bags of mediocrity, banality and quality; but no one publisher – or developer for that matter – stood out.

Biggest disappointment of the show?
Lego's releases continue to disappoint; they just don't capture the essence of the actual toy set in digital form or function. *Shenmue* was also surprisingly poor.

But the biggest pisser was discovering that Microsoft had pulled the plug on Pseudo Interactive's *Inertia*. (At least the promising, quirky experience seen in 1997 and 1998 was spared the indignity of being released as a dreary combat racing game called *Full Auto*.)

Whose presence – Sega's, Nintendo's or Sony's – impressed you the most?
Once again Nintendo's more open-plan stand proved the most inviting: 'Come touch our stuff', it says – and there's always someone polite and informed available to give you a helping hand.

In terms of content, Nintendo pipped Sony and Sega – but only just. The clean, stylised lines of *Pokemon* and *Mario Golf* were a welcome relief after acres of simulated realism.

What did you make of Sony's rather muted PlayStation 2 display?
Enough technology! What about the software? All this power is all very well, but what about some examples of how the medium might be more conveniently harnessed and exploited than is presently possible?

What did you think of the trends among software at E3?
I guess it's no bad thing to see a continual improvement in the build quality of digital toy sets, but... I can't put my finger on it... I think there's a growing movement towards overcomplication.

What were your overall feelings as you came away from the event?
I left with a sense that shit is happening – the biggest shit ever – and much of it will hit the fan.

SONY SHIFTS INTO LOW GEAR



If there is such a thing as a safe market in the videogaming world, then surely it belongs to the realms of S&M – that's sequels and merchandising. This sector was no more visible at E3 than on Sony's stand, which proferred follow-ups and flakily licensed titles by the shedload. Perhaps the best illustration of Sony's apparent dependence on tried-and-tested concepts was the appearance of Lara Croft in at least three guises (real-life model, large plasticky figure, and gigantic inflatable), despite the fact that no new *Tomb Raider* title was on show to the masses. The sight of Sony employees – wearing company-branded shirts – lining up at Sega's stand in an effort to sample Dreamcast wares, meanwhile, said just as much about the PlayStation's presence at E3. The pyramidal PlayStation 2 demo stand drew constant attention, but apart from arousing the drooling flood of visiting philistines, it was not enough to give Sony's E3 presence a showstopping lift.



DINO CRISIS

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: In-house

'Massive' was the general opinion at LA regarding Capcom's latest 'survival horror' effort. The E3 version was more impressive than the one **Edge** last viewed behind closed doors at the Tokyo Game Show, and played convincingly.









Achieving levels of tension last evident in *Silent Hill*, *Dino Crisis* is more cinematic than Konami's game – but could be equally brief

RESIDENT EVIL NEMESIS

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: In-house

Still set in the infamous Racoon City, but with new characters and monster types, Capcom's third *Evil* treads awkwardly familiar territory. The game was still capable of drawing big crowds at E3, though. Interview and report next month.







Some enemies appear rather more 'fresh' than others, and they display more environmental awareness than those of past *Evils*

GRAN TURISMO 2

■ Publisher: SCE ■ Developer: Polyphony Digital Inc.

As one of the first titles to be pounced upon by Euro journos, word quickly got around concerning a 'disappointing' *GT2*. Having played the admittedly limited demo for some time, however, **Edge** remains undeterred regarding its potential.







With only one track and a mere handful of cars in its E3 debut form, *GT* failed to blow E3 visitors away – at least not at first sight

FINAL FANTASY VIII

■ Publisher: SquareSoft ■ Developer: In-house

The game's delayed release only made showgoers more hungry to grab a taste of it in intelligible, western form. Apart from this obvious cash cow, however, there was little of note from SquareSoft, which disappointed US fans.







The spells still look as glorious as they did in the Japanese original. For rabid RPG fans, the September release seems a long way off...

WIPEOUT 3

■ Publisher: Psygnosis

■ Developer: In-house





Apart from having the hippest promotional T-shirts at E3, Psygnosis had one of the most technically accomplished PlayStation titles in *Wipeout 3*. Naturally in a more advanced state than it was when **Edge** viewed it for last month's issue, the game could be the last word in fantasy-themed racing on Sony's current hardware.


SPRING
CENTRE
Human Shoes



MADE IN



HONG KONG

In a market where demand outstrips supply in the pursuit of the latest software at the best price, piracy is thriving. An exclusive Edge report

In 1994, a study into worldwide software piracy by the Business Software Association and the Software Publisher's Association estimated that 64 per cent of software sales in Hong Kong were, in fact, pirate copies. Three years later, a 1997 report (again, by the BSA and SPA) placed that figure at 67 per cent. Piracy as a growth industry? A problematic success.

There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics. A visit to Hong Kong, however, lends credence to such damning figures. You don't have to search with any great skill to locate pirate software. It's just there, tucked away in corners or quietly sidelining legitimate software retailers.

Overtly, on a superficial, potential-bill-through-parliament level, Hong Kong's government agencies are taking steps to reduce piracy. Their efforts, while not to be belittled, are hampered by deep-rooted political, social and financial issues. From the proximity and influence of China – the world's most notorious pirates – to the sheer affordability of such wares, every proffered solution seems to neglect yet another problematic facet.

A warning shot

Three years ago, and in sharp contrast to their previous, woolly policies, the Hong Kong government made a well-publicised stand against piracy. In an industry-appeasing gesture, retailers that persisted in touting illegal copies of videogames and business software were driven from the infamous Golden Arcade. Once renowned as a hotbed of piracy, it has become an 'official' area, dedicated to the sale of legitimate commercial goods.

As a tentative first step, this act was of subtle worth. Although it is arguable that it served as a sweeping-under-the-carpet gesture rather than genuine cleansing *per se*, its ultimate effect will become tangible in later years. Pirate stores are still commonplace, their locations known to many gamers. But by usurping such stores from their relatively comfortable position of mainstream acceptability, the Hong Kong authorities are waging an astute war. Their targets are not, in a number of respects, the retailers themselves, but the consumers that frequent their stores.

Moral distinction

In nations where piracy is an underground means of acquiring software, advocates cite the cost of commercial releases as justification. For all but those actually involved in the industry – from legitimate retailers to publishers – this can prove a pervasive argument. After all, in the eyes of many, a copy of a videogame differs little from a CD recommended and recorded by a friend, or a film videotaped from TV. More importantly, a £10 CD containing all three *Tekken* games is no Garden of Eden-like quandary for the punter seeking a PlayStation beat 'em up. There just isn't a moral distinction: it's a transaction, a bargain. It's only through the existence of suitable copyright laws and agencies capable of enforcing them that prevents such forbidden fruit from being undistinguished, everyday purchases.

In Hong Kong, though, pirate games *are* freely available. Imagine strolling through, for example, a London shopping centre, passing Electronics Boutique, and later HMV, you reach a side-street. In a nearby basement, an independent software store is selling *Ridge Racer 4* for less than a tenner. Furthermore, brand-new (and, occasionally, pre-release) Japanese games are on sale for pocket-money prices. If this isn't the norm for the Hong Kong consumer, it's certainly not a world away. On a recent visit to the island, while soaking up the atmosphere in the many shopping arcades, **Edge** spoke tentatively with pirate store owners and legal authorities to bring you an exclusive insight into one of the world's most fascinating underground shopping experiences...

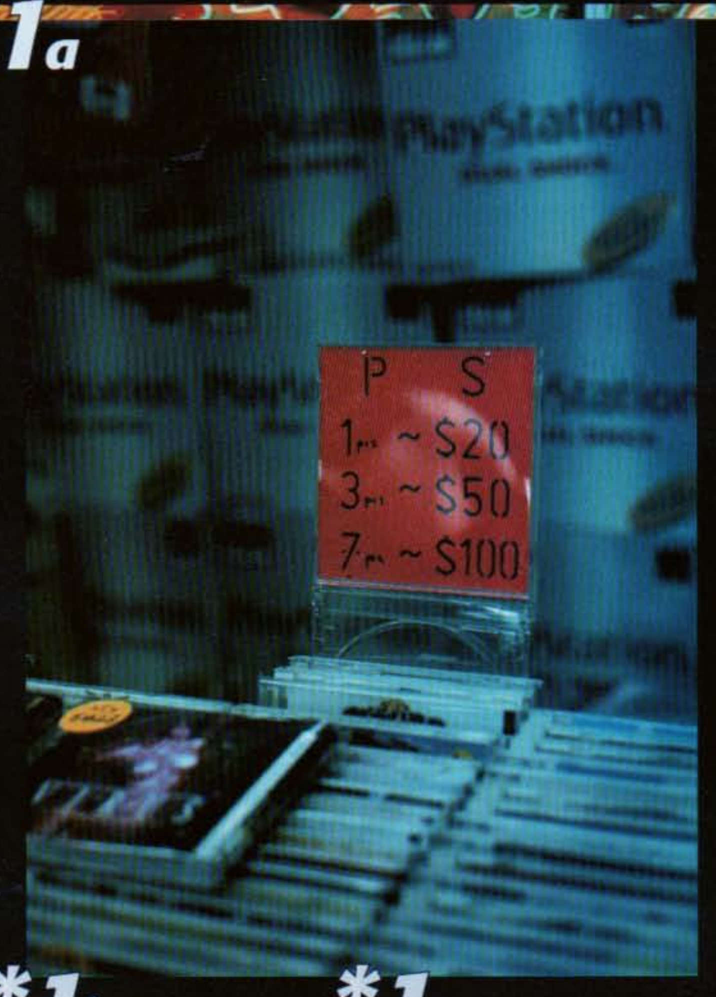
*1a

The pirate shops

Despite the well-publicised expulsion of such shops from the Golden Shopping Arcade, the pirate retailer continues to thrive. It's a mere two minutes' walk to reach the nearest pirate store from the Golden Arcade, and the adjacent photograph is testament to their continued, profitable existence.

Lacking the veneer of respectability that a shopping-centre location confers, those displaced by the Hong Kong government rely on word of mouth and hand-written signs to advertise their presence. This, invariably, proves enough. Those who frequent games stores are fully aware of these establishments. Casual gamers, of course, will be attracted by anecdotes of decidedly cheaper software. The Golden Arcade war was a beginning; that most delicate of times. For the uneducated, it appears little more than a sweeping-under-the-carpet manoeuvre. Piracy, unfettered and unashamed, lives on in basements and second-floor apartments, typified by their rough-and-ready appearance and – invariably – row upon row of PlayStation software.

New games – be they of western or oriental origin – become available as copies within days of their commercial release in Japan. Some titles even slip through security procedures at established publishers, and arrive in Hong Kong stores weeks, even months, before their legitimate on-sale date. **Edge** noted, for example, that Konami's *Rasetsu no Ken*, due for Japanese release in June, is easily obtained in 'finished' form here.



New games become available as copies within days of their commercial release in Japan. Some titles arrive in Hong Kong weeks before their legitimate on-sale date

Speaking to the owner of one shop, **Edge** is told that *Dance Dance Revolution* is not currently available to buy. The copy protection software on its commercial release is, apparently, hard to crack. "But it's only a matter of time," the shop assistant offers helpfully. Other store owners are less amiable. Understanding, naturally, that pirate retailers will not welcome the presence of a photographer, **Edge**'s cameraman uses a concealed device. One attendant, vigilant and suspicious, discovers this, and with verbal violence (its physical counterpart strongly intimated) demands that the camera's film is removed immediately.

*1b The Golden Arcade

Once an area rife with pirate stores, the Golden Arcade (Sham Sui Po) is one of Hong Kong's foremost sources of legitimate commercial releases. The disparity in prices between these 'official' stores and their dodgy counterparts is considerable, though. In the pirate shops you can acquire a single PlayStation game for $15HK (approx £1.20), or seven for $100HK (£8). In the Golden Arcade, the going rate for a new game is in the region of $340HK (£27). Import games, direct from Japan, are slightly more expensive. $360HK (£29) is, it seems, the going rate.

The game stores are located in the basement of the Golden Arcade. Perusing their stock, it's hard to shake the suspicion that the RRPs of many games are fixed with one eye on the Japanese market. But Hong Kong just doesn't have the same average standard of living. Furthermore, Japanese retailers and publishers set prices safe in the knowledge that their comparatively affluent customers won't find pirate versions with such ease. Circumstances are somewhat different in Hong Kong, however. Why buy a single, 'genuine' release when you can get almost 20 pirated equivalents for the same price?

*1b

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*1c Technology trip

It may be a modern cliché, but the term 'toys for the boys' remains an astute phrase in the east. Boys (be they ten or 30) do, indeed, have a propensity for gadgets. Hong Kong is therefore a Mecca for those who have even a passing interest in technological oddities.

For a mere handful of loose change, you can buy what appears – at a cursory glance – to be a genuine PlayStation. Take it home and plug it into the TV, though, and it plays a version of *Pong*, *Breakout*, or another cloned slice of retrogaming. There are N64 'joypads' that perform a similar task. These devices are, invariably, manufactured in China.

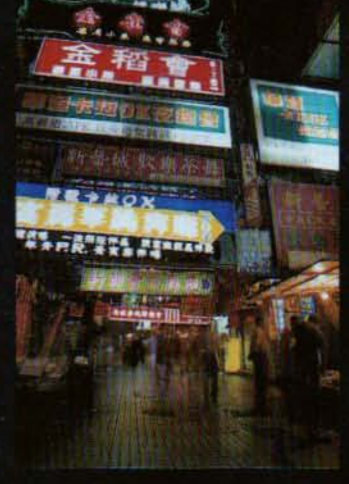
It's no wonder, really, that local authorities (and retailers) relate stories of western gamers and technology buffs travelling to Hong Kong to spend many hours and days trawling the technology quarter. Although the price of a ticket appears large for what is, in effect, a shopping trip, the 'savings' can be considerable. Many are willing to run the risk of arrest once home, simply for a suitcase full of cheap games and a few tatty (yet bizarrely remarkable and desirable) gadgets.


*1c


*1c

*2







Economic threat

Hong Kong's commercial and political contingents are, naturally, keen to arrest the recent growth in piracy statistics. On March 17, 1999 – better known as St Patrick's Day in Ireland, the UK and, as home to the world's biggest stock of honorary Irish, the United States – a rather unusual event took place. Part of the ongoing battle against all forms of counterfeit products, Hong Kong had an 'Anti-Piracy Day'. **Grace Chu**, legal advisor to the Software Publisher's Association in the territory, highlighted an economical imperative behind the event: "Piracy does not only affect the copyright-based industry, but the entire economy of Hong Kong. A recent study revealed that the rate of piracy has a direct impact on the number of jobs that can be created or lost. According to a joint survey, by the Software Publishers' Association and the Business Software Alliance, the piracy rate was 67 per cent in 1997 in Hong Kong. If the piracy rate could be reduced to 27 per cent, it is estimated that the number of jobs in the software industry could be increased by 200 per cent. If we fight piracy, more jobs will be created. If we allow piracy to continue, more jobs will be lost."

The whiff of propaganda here is unmistakable. It is, of course, debatable that a software industry presence in Hong Kong would offer truly significant levels of employment. After all, with a population numbering below eight million, and a mere 100,000 estimated PlayStations in active use, it is not a hugely consequential market in global terms. Such arguments, however, engage the interest of the politically active – a subtle first step on the road to reducing the level of piracy in the region.

> "Piracy affects the entire economy of Hong Kong... the rate of piracy has a direct impact on the number of jobs that can be created or lost"
>
> GRACE CHU, SOFTWARE PUBLISHERS' ASSOCIATION

*3









On a slow boat from China

China has the dubious distinction of being known as a 'one copy' country. That is, one copy of a game or piece of business software will be sold there before being duplicated for the pirate market. With an astonishing 98 per cent of all software being counterfeit, it's no great surprise that China supplies a high proportion of illegal discs to Hong Kong.

As strange as it may seem, such business can prove lucrative for local gangs, or triads. While it's possible to obtain a collection of brand new PlayStation games in Hong Kong for a fraction of the price of a single 'official' equivalent, the manufacturing costs in China are minuscule. It's therefore a very profitable trade, and lacks the draconian preventative penalties found with, for example, drug trafficking.

*4

Mongkok software store

Located in the middle of Kowloon, Mongkok is an area dedicated to electronics, fashion and bars. It's busy and bright – a happy hunting ground for 20-somethings. A short walk away from the busy station is one of Hong Kong's most famous computer centres. Unlike the legit Golden Arcade, this building is almost entirely dedicated to pirate software and dodgy goods.

It's a vast complex. With over 100 shops scattered over four floors, virtually every software whim is catered for. Many of these shops resemble market stores, with technological bric-a-brac juxtaposing row upon row of CD-ROM cases. The range of goods on sale is vast. From *Lightwave* to *3D Studio* and from *Sim City 3000* to *Close Combat 3*, the choice is bewildering. If a game is available in one world market, it will also exist here.

There are 'legitimate' software and hardware stores in Mongkok's Computer Centre. But it's hard to understand how their owners muster the inclination to get out of bed in the morning...

There are only around 40,000 N64s in Hong Kong. Those with a reasonably specced PC, however, can acquire a compilation CD containing many of Nintendo's finest games, running under *UltraHLE*. Emulation, a troublesome issue in western territories, is a lucrative business for local traders. To put the notoriously capable *UHLE* on a CD with every compatible game – now over 20, and rising – is a simple task. The attraction of a ridiculously affordable disc containing *Mario 64*, *GoldenEye* and *Zelda* is, obviously, very high. And, unsurprisingly, it sells.

To put UHLE on a CD with every compatible game is a simple task. The attraction of a ridiculously affordable disc containing Mario 64 and Zelda is, obviously, very high

For Sony, blighted as it is by CD-ROM piracy, emulation represents an equal threat. During **Edge**'s visit, the commercial, full version of *bleem!* is reported to be literally days away. Once embraced by the Hong Kong market, CD compilations of the PS's best titles, bundled with the emu, will become commonplace. *Bleem!*'s creators may – with a certain justification – argue that their product will not impact sales of commercially released games, Sony's largest source of income. The pirates of the far east would agree, of course – if with a slightly different emphasis.

The cheek of the pirate manufacturers is worthy of note, too. The boast on Nintendo packaging that titles such as *Zelda* and *GoldenEye* are 'Only for N64!' are cruelly mimicked on *UltraHLE* cases. *Mario 64*, you are informed, is 'Only for IBM-PC!'

Of course, piracy is not limited to computer software, as music and video piracy is rife. In Mongkok's Computer Centre, the three can be found hand in hand. Video CDs of recent movies are easy to find. The quality of such films is invariably pitiful, though. Using MPEG-1 compression, many are recorded in cinemas, or from TV screens (complete with the shadow and coughing of the pirate). Others, taken from DVD, offer better quality. For the music lover, however, *MP3* compression ensures reasonable quality audio on compilation CDs. Seeing the works of popular artists at pocket-money prices, it's possible to appreciate the music industry's hatred of the *MP3* format.















*5

The moral issue

Dr Kar-Wai, chancellor of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, commented before the island's Anti-Piracy Day that, "The protection of intellectual property must be taken up as a priority issue of our society. Meanwhile, piracy is also about our moral standard. We must also pay attention to the education of a new generation that respects intellectual property rights."

His arguments are valid, and relevant to the software industry's worldwide fight against piracy. In Hong Kong, though, cut-price illegal copies can sit within reasonable walks of commercial equivalents. In a country where the standard of living is proportionally lower than its illustrious neighbour, such prices appear expensive. Morality, after all, is contextually subjective, whereas market forces are absolute.

*6

Legal loopholes

Hong Kong, like many countries, has entrapment laws. This, for a number of years, has proved a stumbling block for police and customs officers. In order to avoid prosecution, many pirate software retailers have studied the entrapment laws of their land. And, observing the letter of the law, they have hit upon an ingenious means of avoiding prosecution. When a customer chooses a piece of software, they are presented with a receipt. The actual software that each display box purports to contain is, in fact, stored at a separate location. This is sent to the shop from a separate storage depot within a short period of time. As convoluted as this procedure may seem, it succeeds in confounding Hong Kong law.





INSIDE THE INDUSTRY

Edge also met with **Cheung Wai Kit**, editor of Hong Kong's weekly multiformat magazine *Gamely*. Owner of the Japanese *Famitsu* licence, and resolutely 'official' in that it only covers genuine, commercial software, *Gamely* is indicative of a slow, yet steady establishment of a more mainstream industry.

Edge: When did you launch *Gamely* magazine?
CW: We launched our first issue in March 1998. We sell about 40,000 copies a week but the market is small, and the competition is rough. To improve the image of our magazine we bought the *Famitsu* licence.
Edge: How big is the Hong Kong videogaming market?
CW: There are approximately 100,000 PlayStations. But that's a big figure compared to the Hong Kong population, which is 6.7 million. It's too early for Dreamcast; figures have yet to be released. There are less than 40,000 Nintendo 64 units.
Edge: What are the most popular genres in Hong Kong?
CW: Gamers are quite similar to their Japanese equivalents. They like to play *Final Fantasy* and the *Dragon Quest* series. The *Street Fighter* and *King of Fighters* games are also popular. The *Bio-Hazard* games and *Metal Gear Solid* were big last year.
Edge: Are there any titles coming from Europe or the US?
CW: Yes. A number of people have altered their PlayStations with Mod chips. And it is possible to find a few [import] foreign titles to play.
Edge: Are there many game developers in Hong Kong?
CW: Yes, but not for consoles. They develop and publish games for PC. They also have to face the piracy problem [laughs].
Edge: How important is the pirate market in Hong Kong?
CW: Approximately 60 per cent of software sold are copies. People are willing to buy official software, but it is difficult to not be tempted by cheaper copies.
Edge: Do you think the situation will change?
CW: Yes. The government decreed that piracy is a serious crime. It has to be stopped – otherwise, foreign businesses will be afraid to invest in Hong Kong. Recently, and perhaps due to the success of the PlayStation, piracy increased. But I think it will decrease. It's becoming a bigger risk for pirates. **E**



Gamely's Cheung Wai Kit: "Piracy has to be stopped"



"The protection of intellectual property must be taken up as a priority issue of our society. Meanwhile, piracy is also about our moral standard"

DR KAI-WAI, HONG KONG UNIVERSITY





TESTSCREEN

The definitive monthly assessment of the world's latest videogames

Use the cash, Lucas

Disappointed that neither of the 'Star Wars: Episode One' games failed to fully do justice to their potential-heavy source material? Perhaps. Surprised? Hardly.

After all, when was the last time a movie licence emerged as anything special? (And no, as good as *Aliens Vs Predator* and *X-Wing Alliance* are, they're not direct film translations so they don't count.) *Mission: Impossible*? Er, not quite. You'll need to go further back than that. That's right, *GoldenEye*. And before that? Okay, give up – you'll be there all day.

That games licensed from movies are generally a waste of a cheap programming effort is nothing new, of course. Traditionally, games built around Tinseltown's domain have left much to be desired, but on occasions some have redefined the standard. Remember *Cliffhanger* and *The Last Action Hero* on the SNES? Both were remarkable in that they managed to be significantly worse than the films they attempted to portray – and that has to be regarded as some kind of achievement.

Fittingly (and rather conveniently), every other title reviewed this month scores higher than either LucasArts game. Nevertheless, the disillusion caused by this issue's film licences (especially *The Phantom Menace*; *Racer* remains a fair, if rather stifled, experience) was quickly brushed under the carpet by the unexpected revelation of three of this month's other new titles.

Crystal Dynamics' *Soul Reaver* had long shown potential, of course – something that was thankfully corroborated only a few minutes after review code started spinning in the office PlayStation's CD drive. But *Hidden and Dangerous* is a gem that has sneakily come out of no man's land, delivering the kind of tension and degree of involvement that most developers only read about. Albeit on a rather different level, *Midtown Madness* – whose open city structure made *Metropolis Street Racer*'s predetermined routes feel more than a little restrictive when **Edge** revisited Bizarre Creations' game at E3 – is another straight-out-of-nowhere delight.

In a market where suits, spreadsheets, bottom lines and massive marketing budgets continue to take precedence over creativity at many softcos, it's difficult to imagine the future of movie-licensed games being anything other than bleak – for the consumer, at least.

Still, the developers of such titles can sleep soundly at night – or at least those employed by LucasArts can, for both *The Phantom Menace* and *Racer* work at least as effectively as the movie.





Fortunately, real surprises like *Hidden and Dangerous* (left) and *Midtown Madness* (centre), more than redress the sad imbalance caused by exploitative, film-licensed mediocrity (right)

Index

Edge evaluates games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. A game receiving a 'seven out of ten', for example, is a very competent title with noticeable flaws but which should still appeal to a considerable range of players – naturally more so to those who favour the title's particular genre. It does, after all, score two points above average and should therefore not be considered as such.

Edge's rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten.

Videogames on the Edge

This month's stress relievers



Quake III test (PC/Mac) Activision
"Grenade launcher. Must find the grenade launcher. Come on, regenerate, for God's sake. Regenerate, you bastard. They're here. Aaaaaaaaargh, too late..."



Perfect Dark (N64) Rare
There was no question about it: this was **Edge**'s most played game of E3, if only because it had so much to live up to. And it fulfilled many promises.



Homeworld (PC) Havas
A review version has yet to materialise, but **Edge** has been fiercely refining its space-based combat strategies thanks to an online-only beta disc.



Tetris DX (GB) Nintendo
A visit to the owner of the *Tetris* licence for a forthcoming feature brought this out of the cupboard. Has *any* link-up game been this addictive?

SOUL REAVER











Objects such as spears and torches can be picked up and used as weapons against the 20 or so monsters. Combat is quick, intuitive and extremely brutal



The gothic tombs, carved stone walls and shadowy archways make an imposing backdrop to the game, adding to the eerie atmosphere



Although E3 more or less revealed an industry bereft of creative experimentation, there are a few developers taking risks out there. Crystal Dynamics, for example, could easily have gone into *Gex* overdrive by now, creating nothing but multiple sequels to the 'hilarious' platform romp. But no, now the studio has succumbed to the dark side, resurrecting a shadowy 1996 title and turning it on its head. Or rather – in keeping with the dark atmosphere of the game – ripped it limb from limb and cast it into the pit of hell. *Soul Reaver* is the interesting and compelling result.

There are also seven spells and the **eponymous Soul Reaver sword to collect,** providing **a powerful arsenal** with which to confront the game's many, **beautifully realised monsters**

Interesting and compelling, perhaps, but not blessed with the tightest of storylines. Raziel is a vampire, once the key henchman to lord of the undead, Kain. After an argument involving a pair of wings, Raziel is cast into the Lake of the Dead by his jealous and paranoid master, and there he languishes for a thousand years. He's finally rescued by The Elder, a sort of pagan god who enlists the fallen anti-hero in a quest to topple Kain. The action then takes place in Nosgoth, a kingdom savaged by Kain's millennium-long rule of darkness which is on the brink of apocalyptic collapse. It's like every straight-to-video 'Hellraiser' wannabe rolled into one.

Beneath the overly complex storyline is a game which takes gothic themes and concepts and expertly weaves them into a familiar genre: the 3D arcade adventure. Like Lara Croft and the dozens of thirdperson heroes that have followed her, Raziel can run, jump, climb, swim and battle with his foe – anything to get him through the vast complex environment. He also has puzzles to work through (another familiar staple of the arcade adventure ilk). Levers, locks, dials and traps all have to be contended with,

Format: **PlayStation/PC**	
Publisher: **Eidos**	
Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**	
Price: **£45**	
Release: **Out now**	





The epic landscape (top) is complemented by small-scale effects, such as burning zombies







Raziel cuts an imposing figure with masked face and tattered clothing. An undead superhero







End-of-level baddies are suitably imposing, and beating them isn't simply a case of exploiting a weakness – you need to employ puzzle-solving skills

and the designers have been ruthless at times, often placing pieces of a conundrum rooms apart to keep the player's lateral thinking challenged – there's a great section near the beginning where a series of huge stone blocks have to be dragged through a multilevel dungeon to open a series of gates. Players unable to manipulate objects in their minds while picturing several rooms at once need not apply.

Even more interesting is the fact that Raziel cannot die. When his energy runs out, or when he chants the relevant spell, he simply transfers from the material realm to the spectral realm – a sort of shadowy, warped copy of reality. Far from being a punishment, this transference between the realms is an essential aspect of the game, often giving the player access to previously unreachable platforms and rooms. This is a brave, complex and inspired piece of design, not only visually stunning (the rooms twist and distort as you transfer into the ghost world – a great effect), but also ripe with gameplay possibilities. You're forced to think on different levels throughout *Soul Reaver*, always considering each room as two rooms, the answer to a puzzle possibly existing in either.

Also impressive is the carefully layered progression of the lead character. To begin with he can't swim or climb, but whenever he defeats an end-of-level boss he gains a new ability, giving access to new areas. There are also seven spells and the eponymous Soul Reaver sword to collect, providing a powerful arsenal with which to confront the game's many, beautifully realised monsters. Armed combat, incidentally, is also possible. Spears and torches can be picked up throughout the game and thrust or thrown at baddies in a simple, intuitive combat system.

As for the game environment itself, Crystal Dynamics has constructed a nightmarish, gothic world of epic (and non-linear) proportions. Huge citadels carved into sheer rock faces, mammoth columns spiralling into infinite space above you, hideous monsters shuffling in the shadows, tattered flags hanging from castle balconies – they're all crisply defined, intricately detailed and hugely evocative. In the larger areas there can be a problem with intrusive fogging, making it difficult to get your bearings, but that's the price you pay for visual opulence on the PlayStation, and here it's a price worth paying.

There are other downsides. The gameplay, essentially based on puzzle-solving and accurate jumping, isn't really far removed from other arcade adventure fare (Raziel can glide, though, which is a nice effect borrowed from *MDK*). The save system is also flawed, sometimes forcing you to replay large sections of the game to get to new areas. However, if you want a darker, more fiendish alternative to *Tomb Raider et al*, with some new gameplay slants and breathtaking visuals, *Soul Reaver* will hit the spot.

Edge rating:

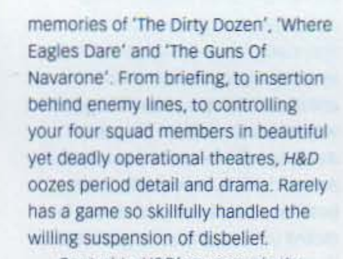
Eight out of ten

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS



There's a diverse range of weaponry on offer, from stun guns and bazookas to more subtle aids like German uniforms. You can even loot enemy corpses





Rain and fog can distort visibility to the point where every shadowy figure becomes a potential Nazi. The tension and adventure is gut-wrenching

Since the crowning glories of *Half-Life*, a palpable air of resignation has settled over 3D PC gaming as observers acknowledged that there was slim chance of any game reaching similar peaks again in the near future. But now Illusion Softworks, a little-known Czech coding shop, has penetrated the gloom with *Hidden and Dangerous*, a title that rolls back gaming frontiers with its astute sense of realism, style, ambience and mastery of psychological suspense.

It's the game that *Delta Force*, *Special Ops* and *Rainbow Six* sought to be. It's a game distilled from memories of 'The Dirty Dozen', 'Where Eagles Dare' and 'The Guns Of Navarone'. From briefing, to insertion behind enemy lines, to controlling your four squad members in beautiful yet deadly operational theatres, *H&D* oozes period detail and drama. Rarely has a game so skillfully handled the willing suspension of disbelief.

Central to *H&D*'s success is the freedom afforded by the control system. It's incredibly versatile, and it needs to be as the player leads his commando quartet through missions which may involve demolishing a vital bridge, impersonating German officers to access secret bases, or extracting a defecting rocket scientist from the most heavily guarded bunker complex in the Fatherland.

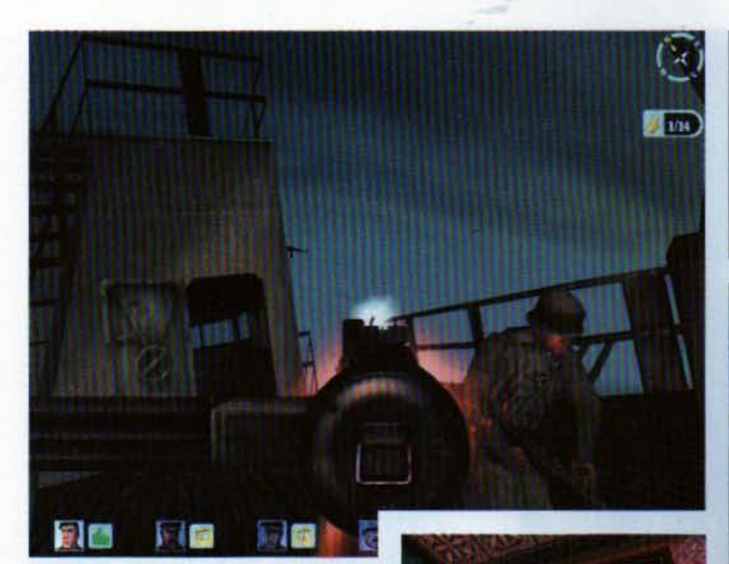
Each trooper can be controlled in the first- or thirdperson, and has been thoroughly trained in the disciplines of crouching, sprinting, side-rolling, belly-crawling and even creeping. You'll instinctively approach every situation with caution and stealth; the first mission swiftly teaches novices that *H&D* is no big gun day trip. You'll soon be scouting the route ahead with a point man, making maximum use of terrain and bringing each soldier into position to cover their comrades, or to draw a bead on the hapless German guard caught in the sniper scope.

Access to first- and thirdperson perspectives enables you to perfect positions, using the thirdperson to accurately wedge a trooper between





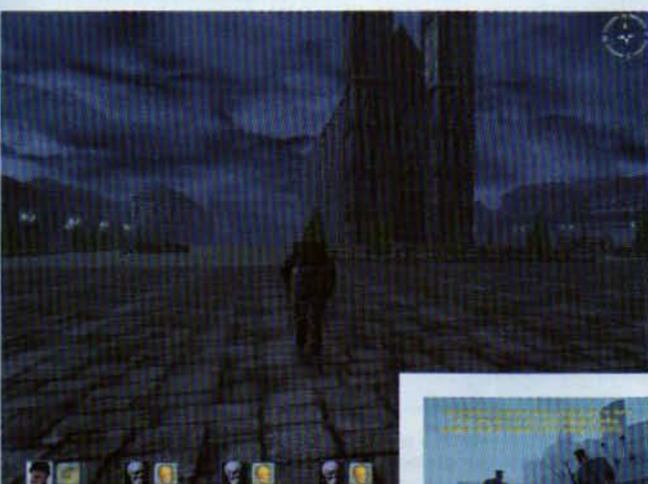
You can generally make use of anything you can see in the game. Searchlights, motorbikes, tanks, jeeps and boats are all available



Every commando is the sum of four stats: shooting, endurance, stealth and strength, and their abilities have a tangible effect



Format:	**PC**
Publisher:	**Take 2 Interactive**
Developer:	**Illusion Softworks**
Price:	**£40**
Release:	**Out now**



Hidden and Dangerous is free of the retarded AI that marred *Rainbow Six*, which means you can order your men around knowing that they can defend themselves

Cracking synchronised control of four ingame characters is a grand achievement and **adds immeasurably to the credibility** of *H&D* as the first covert team game that **really delivers**

boulder and tree, then switching to the firstperson to make sure he has a clear line of sight. What's more, you can control your troops collectively. Instant squad actions like 'follow' or 'advance' can be accessed via keyboard shortcuts, or you can plan more elaborate manoeuvres on the map screen. Using a simple 'chalkboard' system of waypoints and icons, you can freeze the game at any time and quickly orchestrate a sequence of moves. For example, you can synchronise watches and order a trooper to plant demolition charges on the target, while another simultaneously executes a dummy run and the rest pour covering fire into the German positions. Cracking synchronised control of four ingame characters is a grand achievement and adds immeasurably to the credibility of *H&D* as the first covert team game that really delivers.

The graphics engine is equally impressive. Each level is a sweeping WWII tableau, lavishly detailed according to the theme of the six diverse campaigns. Exterior and interior locations such as V2 rocket sites, subterranean submarine docks and the snowfields of Norway are all handled equally smoothly and, crucially, endow each campaign with a distinctive feel that prevents the game from becoming repetitive.

Similarly, every mission has a true sense of occasion. One moment you may be slaloming through a fleet of Panzers in a half-track, the next you might be night-fighting against a backdrop of flares and tracer fire. It's a constant stream of exciting and varied gameplay that's further enhanced by Illusion's command of psychological tension. A limited pool of manpower for each campaign and the omission of a mid-mission save-game facility automatically forces the player to care for his troops. Suddenly it's a wrench to lose a man.

There are innumerable graphical flourishes that help to establish the atmosphere of every scene, like the Italian levels where the interminable rain and fog distort visibility and raise the sense of danger as every shadow becomes a potential Nazi.

There are glitches, though. Certain aspects of the control system are clumsy, and there are occasional graphical anomalies, but *Hidden and Dangerous* is such a sweeping success that it dwarfs any criticism. It's challenging, deep, acutely atmospheric and an intense adventure. PC gaming triumphs.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



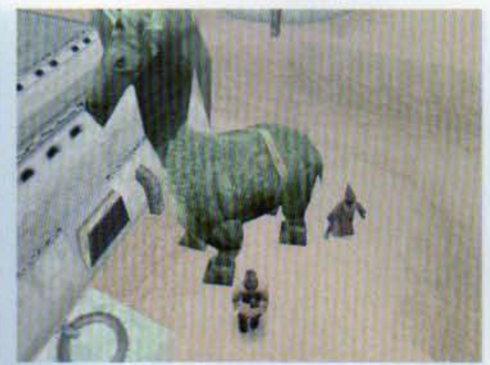


The multiplayer option enables up to four players to take a commando each and attempt any mission in the game

STAR WARS: EPISODE 1 THE PHANTOM MENACE



Many levels see the two Jedi fighting together. You can control only one at a time and have no choice over when play switches to another character









Due to the awkward control method, battles such as these are hard to win. In fact, retreat is often the best solution if you want to survive







Up close, characters' visuals suffer; Obi-Wan looks more like Cloud from *Final Fantasy VII* than Ewan McGregor. Cut-scenes can use the ingame engine (above)

As the game of the most eagerly awaited (and hyped) movie in cinema history, *The Phantom Menace* always had a lot to live up to. That it hasn't fulfilled such high expectations is perhaps understandable, but the real worry is that LucasArts is content to kickstart the 'Episode One' series with such a distinctly average videogame.

Unlike *Episode I Racer* (see p88), which chooses to focus on just one of the film's action sequences, *The Phantom Menace* allows the player to participate in the entire story of the film. From the opening-crawl text to the climactic final battle and obligatory celebration, the game's events mirror those of its celluloid counterpart exactly. Taking such an unforgiving, warts-and-all approach to the content is not without its problems. In order to best reproduce the combat, exploration and dialogue sequences of the film, Big Ape has opted to blend three inherently different game genres. Part frantic shooter, part puzzle game and part point-and-click adventure, *The Phantom Menace* ultimately fails to satisfy in any camp. The combat isn't complex enough to be involving, the puzzles are often too illogical to be satisfying, and the dialogue trees are too shallow for all but the most amateur adventurers.

The action is generally viewed from an elevated thirdperson perspective, with the camera's position constantly shifting to best present events. Waging battle with the hordes of Battle Droids therefore elicits a more distant view, while engaging in conversation with NPCs produces a dramatically different full close-up. It's a system that, for the most part, works well. Yet the game is lumbered with such a frustratingly clunky control system that large-scale melees and even simple exploration can be rendered problematic. The lack of a strafe key in favour of a feeble sideways roll, for instance, means that deflecting laser fire with your

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **LucasArts**

Developer: **Big Ape**

Price: **£40**

Release: **Out now**



The underwater city is perhaps the most disappointing part of the game











Enter a building and the roof disappears to reveal its contents thanks to a smoothly blended transparency effect (top). While not essential, sub-quests punctuating the main aims will reward you with useful objects

lightsabre is actually a more effective defensive action than attempting to evade it. Jumping, too, is something of an annoyance: often, the Jedi characters are able to leap higher than parts of scenery and buildings, but are inexplicably prevented from gaining access to the roofs by invisible barriers. Sloppy programming and bad level design are the culprits.

In order to achieve a sense of free-flowing narrative, play switches between four of the film's key characters as the levels are completed. The Jedi knights Obi-Wan Kenobi and Qui-Gon Jinn, the young Queen, and the Han Solo-like Captain Panaka all become available as the game progresses, and each offers subtly different variations on combat. A single Force power (Force Push, as seen in the film), somersault jumps, and lightsabres are unique to the Jedi, while the Queen and Panaka tend to rely on traditional (if not very 'Star Wars'-style weapons) blasters, flash grenades and missile launchers.

Having to live up to a lot, ***The Phantom Menace*** is probably best enjoyed as a rich information resource for fans of the film rather than **a classic gaming experience**

Playing the 12 medium-sized levels, with their fundamental mission objectives (push buttons, shoot levers, protect other characters), the overwhelming feeling you get from *The Phantom Menace* is that it was developed with Sony's machine in mind rather than the PC. Everything about it, from the merely average visuals, to the clumsily implemented inventory screen, screams 'console'.

In fact, *The Phantom Menace* is probably best enjoyed as a rich information resource for fans of the film series, rather than a classic gaming experience. By hitting the shelves before the movie opens in the UK, playing it is the easiest way to get a grip on the plot structure, characters and locations that will soon be making it into cinema legend.

After the sophistication of *Jedi Knight* and *X-Wing Alliance*, both of which demonstrated just how well the 'Star Wars' universe can be translated to the PC, it's impossible not to be disappointed with *The Phantom Menace*. A golden opportunity, tragically missed.

Edge rating:

Five out of ten



Battle tanks, thankfully, cannot 'see' through a wall of flowers

EVERQUEST

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Electronics Boutique**

Developer: **989 Studios/ Verant Interactive**

Price: **£35 (plus monthly subs)**

Release: **Out now**









***EverQuest* offers five views – firstperson, top-down, above and behind, plus two free cameras. All external cameras can be zoomed and moved around**





While tough at the start, the menu and inventory screens – in true RPG fashion – are icon-based and simple to use





The 3D card-boosted visuals really impress – as you equip your character with weapons and armour, his appearance changes in glorious 3D detail

Despite the massive popularity of firstperson shoot 'em ups on the Internet, few attempts have been made to create truly online games that take full advantage of the possibilities of player interaction. And those that have – most notably *Ultima Online* and *Meridian 59* – suffer numerous flaws. Now, however, Sony-owned 989 Studios and developer Verant Interactive have raised the bar a notch with *EverQuest*.

Like *Ultima Online* and *Meridian 59*, *EverQuest* is a roleplaying game – perhaps the gaming style that most readily lends itself to online play, and certainly one of the most established (text-based multiuser dungeons predate the Internet). Unlike *Ultima Online*, its world is presented in glorious 3D. And unlike *Meridian 59*, the technology used is right up to date – a 3D card is essential – resulting in great visuals, even by comparison to many of today's firstperson blasters.

EverQuest is set in the fantasy world of Norath, populated with numerous staples of the genre plus some unique new concepts. The result is a game world that most RPG fans will find easy to get to grips with, but still offers a sense of mystery.

Although based on the standard 'class and level' format (an RPG standard ever since *Dungeons & Dragons*), this is combined with a more modern skill development engine. Your race, class and level determine what skills your character can use, but they increase by use and practice. Skill 'caps' based on your class and level limit the maximum rating in each skill: while both a Warrior and a Cleric may have the 1H Blunt weapons skill, the Warrior can increase it to a higher rating .

Unlike the vast majority of RPGs, both online and off, there are no 'killer' classes in *EverQuest*. Not only does this emphasise cooperative play, but only if you choose to activate player killer status for your character can you attack or be attacked, and then only by other player killer characters. That's great news for those who've been permanently scarred by bad experiences in *Ultima Online*.

One critical fact of *EverQuest* is that it can be very tough at the start, when even a measly rat can kill you. Even after you've gained a few levels, the game remains very unforgiving. The system emphasises combat very heavily – although there are many quests to complete, the rewards are normally meagre – which can become a little repetitive. It requires a lot of time and dedication to build a decent character, which easily translates into huge phone bills if you're not careful.

Nonetheless, *EverQuest* is the best online roleplaying game yet, and offers months of enjoyment while pointing the way towards multiplayer gaming's future.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

MIDTOWN MADNESS

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Microsoft**

Developer: **Angel Studios**

Price: **£35**

Release: **Out now**







***Midtown Madness* offers a wide variety of cars, with more hidden vehicles becoming available through the game. You even get to handle a big-rig (left)**







The control system gives you complete freedom of the city, thus enabling you to try out nifty shortcuts in order to save time. This can lead to some frantic driving (above)

One of the great joys of videogaming is picking up an unheralded piece of software from somewhere near the back of the publicity parade and discovering that you've got an entertainment riot on your hands. *Midtown Madness* is just such a case, with its dashing mix of exuberance, chaos and arcade racing nous providing the perfect antidote to the PC platform's ponderous obsession with stats and complexity.

The central premise – take part in a succession of illegal street races through one of America's largest conurbations (Chicago, in this case), clock checkpoints and unlock hidden cars and courses – is hardly new. But in acknowledging the racing certainties, *Midtown* goes a step further, liberating the game structure so you feel like you have complete freedom while you're simultaneously engaged by the carefully sequenced challenges on offer.



Even the police join in the 'fun' by ramming cars off the road

The key to this is the city itself. It's a dynamic system that self-regulates, independent of the race. There's no law, for example, stating you must take the checkpoints in the given order. If you can carve a smarter route through back streets, glass-fronted malls and the left-hand side of the freeway, then *Midtown*'s not about to stand in your way. Often it's worth tailing the more adventurous CPU cars, which are more than happy to experiment with their routes.

During any given race you'll have to slalom through traffic jams, carefree pedestrians (who always just escape), death-trap crossroads, box-littered alleyways, leafy parks, homicidal police and belligerent cab drivers, who'll happily have an accident trying to hit you. Additional atmosphere is imbued by the realism of the setting, amply conveyed by the graphics engine. Weaving down the highway is as distinct from reckless speeding in a pedestrian plaza as replaying it all again in an articulated big-rig is distinct from careering around in a Ford Mustang GT.



The frenzied action proves gratuitously gory, while the flawed AI is disappointing

However, *Midtown*'s most enduring achievement is its physics engine. Newtonian interference can be managed with a slider control, but *Midtown* is essentially governed by the cod physics of Hollywood. This often has absolutely hilarious consequences as cars mount each other at the least excuse, skate on two wheels, and generally collaborate in the most hysterical and wince-inducing pile-ups that have ever been seen on the PC.

It really only remains for **Edge** to acknowledge the criminal omission of an action-replay facility and the failure of the game to translate into multiplay, before urging compulsory *Midtown Madness* for PC gamers of any persuasion.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

STAR WARS: EPISODE 1 RACER

Format: **Nintendo 64** (also published for PC by Activision)

Publisher: **Nintendo**

Developer: **LucasArts**

Price: **£50**

Release: **Out now**









The variety and design of the tracks available is excellent, and in later levels collapsing, as well as destructible, scenery is common



A turbo can be employed until the engines overheat, requiring a cooling-down period. Damage can be repaired during the race, although some velocity is lost







Don't get too excited – there are no weapons in this game



You'd expect a lot of developers currently working on futuristic racers would dream of acquiring the 'Episode One' licence to subsequently slap all over their respective projects, safe in the knowledge that the slightest association with the 'Star Wars' franchise should ensure that sales figures augment tenfold. At least. You need only look at the current performance of *Rogue Squadron* on the N64 for proof, and while it's a momentarily diverting title, it falls some way short of recent classics such as *Zelda*.

Thankfully for gamers, this 'Episode One'-sponsored racing event is several places further up the grid than the mediocrity of previous 'Star Wars'-themed N64 offerings. In other words, the licence isn't being exploited – at least, not as shamefully as it has been in the past. Even when you peek beneath its 'Episode One'-tinged polygonal cloak, this still rubs shoulders with a lot of racing games currently around – futuristic or contemporary. Although it's certainly not one of the best.

Six racers are initially available, but as you progress through the four tournaments on offer (the first three offering seven tracks, the last bearing four), beaten competitors achieve selectable status. Nintendo may claim over 20 courses, but these amount to variations of the first seven. However, most of the later tracks include enough alternate sections to make them feel appealingly different, and as their length increases, so too does the challenge.

In between races, money can be spent on upgrading and replacing damaged parts of your podracer in order to boost acceleration, top speed, handling, and braking ability, among other elements. The amount of earned cash not only depends on your position as you cross the finish line, but also on how confident you felt before the race. A 'fair' setting sees money distributed evenly among the top-finishing quartet (in the early races only the first four go through to the next heat); 'skilled' sees a disproportionate amount being awarded to the first-placed pod; while 'winner takes all' does exactly what it says on the screen.

Graphically, the game is often impressive. Some of the later courses are cluttered with polygonal decor – buildings and other architectural structures being the main culprits – yet the proceedings continue to move along with surprising speed (certainly in the 'bumper' view – one of four available). The framerate isn't silkily smooth, but it remains perfectly playable, and can be improved by bypassing the Expansion Pak, although you're then running the game at a lower res setting. Fogging and build-up are also evident, but again their presence is not overwhelming. Forget the twoplayer option, though – it's unplayable other than on the most barren of courses.

Episode 1 Racer is hardly spectacular, but it is an accessible, enjoyable and challenging game which should keep fans of gravity-defying racing satisfied, and not simply because of its prestigious licence. But within this genre, *F-Zero X* still reigns supreme.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten

F-1 WORLD GRAND PRIX II







Format: **Nintendo 64**

Publisher: **Video System**

Developer: **Paradigm**

Price: **£40**

Release: **July 2**



Use of the Expansion Pak results in more textures and extended replays. Framerate isn't affected

You've probably had enough of Formula One games by now, but not only is this the sequel to one of the finer examples around (see **E**63), it's on a system that can hardly claim to have an abundant market share in this sub-genre. Furthermore, it comes from a publisher whose relationship with the Formula One Association dates back to SNES days, so its existence is at least more justifiable than most.

Casual observers may miss the subtle alterations to this year's edition: based on the 1998 season, the cars are narrower, tyres now sport grooves, and a few of the drivers start the season clad in shiny new team overalls. Naturally, there are changes affecting the game's heart. The graphics have been improved, with better textures depicting the 22 cars' new liveries, as well as more accurate trackside detail. The challenge mode, which sees you re-enact specific instances from the season makes a very welcome return, with updated scenarios to test your analogue driving skill. The tutorial mode is new and helps newcomers by providing them with racing strategies for each of the 16 circuits.

More importantly, the handling feels lightly tweaked and more accessible (at beginner level) than its predecessor. Similarly, the driver aids seem less restrictive than before, but the real fun still doesn't really start until you're ready to switch them off. Which isn't to say that *F-1 World GP II* has been transformed into a masses-loving arcade experience – it still demands perseverance and a fair amount of dedication – but it has become a little more welcoming. Still, steering remains fairly twitchy and could prove frustrating for anyone unfamiliar with last year's game.

Possibly the most crucial revision lies in the title's AI. Fellow competitors lock up their brakes, spin or crash out, and engines blow with authentic regularity, complete with new smoke effects. It may not sound like much, but the resulting sense of involvement cannot be overlooked, particularly as too many racing games nowadays fail to provide just that.

Essentially, *F-1 World GP II* retains and refines its predecessor's qualities while adding new elements that only enhance the already highly competent experience. However, while the result is undeniably superior to last year's effort, the very nature of the sport it depicts also prevents it from being distinctly different from it, hence the slightly lower mark. Although it's difficult to recommend to owners of the original, if you missed out first time around then this is easily the N64's definitive F1 title.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten



It's all in the detail – brake discs glow after extensive application







Novelties include blown engines (top) and tyre smoke from locked brakes (centre). The competent twoplayer option makes another appearance (above)

OMEGA BOOST

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **SCEI**

Developer: **Polyphony Digital Inc.**

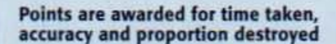
Price: **¥5,800 (£30)**

Release: **Out now (Japan); July 23 (UK)**









Points are awarded for time taken, accuracy and proportion destroyed







***Omega Boost*'s graphics are absolutely magnificent throughout. Its developer has surpassed itself with a machine nearly five years old**











Build up enough power, and one button press unleashes the Viper Boost against helpless enemy forces (above)



For a developer normally associated with driving titles (*Motor Toon GP* and *Gran Turismo* among them), *Omega Boost* represents something of a drastic departure. It does have more in common with its predecessors than may be initially apparent, however. It's a skillfully programmed title, and therefore technically proficient, throwing around tons of fabulous poly-based models to a plethora of stirring visual effects, while maintaining an impressively constant high framerate. It's also well designed, with good use of colour and aesthetically pleasing menus from front to back.

It remains a typically Japanese game, though. Not because of the obvious fact that it depicts human warriors in mecha suits fighting against a variety of other mechanised weaponry, but rather in its structure, which encourages replayability if all of the game's many extra features are to become accessible.

Its essence lies firmly rooted in the shoot 'em up titles of yesteryear, and sees you facing waves of mechanised enemies determined to put an end to your solitary planet-saving mission. Except that unlike previous similarly themed blasters, *Omega Boost's* relentless action occurs entirely in 3D. This could have been disastrous, but Polyphony has implemented some crucial touches, including an auto-turn function which rapidly moves your character around to face the next enemy, thus overcoming any disorientation (which is more likely to happen in firstperson, rather than the thirdperson view).

While flying around, you have three weapons at your disposal. The traditional mecha-fan favourite, the Vulcan rifle, is a given. But for groups of enemies, the homing missiles are a more efficient bet – these lock on to targets in *Afterburner/Panzer Dragoon* fashion. The third trick up your angular metal sleeve is the Viper Boost, which sees your character transform into a demented space-age battering ram, complete with spangly blue light trail. This has to be one of the most satisfying (and ludicrously powerful) special weapons ever devised for a shoot 'em up.

Omega Boost is a shortlived experience, however, and despite the substantial amount of extra gaming material, this factor ultimately prevents it from scoring any higher. After getting to grips with your mecha warrior in the training option, competent gamers should be able to complete the campaign mode in a few hours. Yet opening up every additional level (designed as a series of fun challenges, mini-game style) takes considerably longer.

A visually arresting, solidly playable title with typically rich Japanese detail, *Omega Boost* will please shoot 'em up fans.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

HyperMatter 2.0: Softbodies gain realism

"This is the Holy Grail of physically based animation systems," says **Tim Craig**, MD of One Picture Ltd. And he should know. For ten years, One Picture was honing the *HyperMatter* plug-in for *3D Studio Max* until it became the second most-popular plug-in for the industry-standard animation package. But what Craig is really excited about is the latest version, *HyperMatter 2.0*. "Most people are aware of *HyperMatter*," Craig agrees. "What they don't know is that it is a realtime system now."



Realism comes in many shapes and sizes, so the foam monster falls exactly as a foam monster should fall

This state of affairs is unlikely to continue for long, however. Sony has already agreed for One Picture to become a middleware developer for the next-generation PlayStation and it seems certain that *HyperMatter 2.0* will become a core technology for many games developers.

"We fit into Sony's new middleware strategy," explains technical director **Jack Greasley**. "We provide a complete, well-documented, optimised SDK which you can translate into a game and forget about."

And, as demonstrated to **Edge**, the end results are impressive. The current demo utilises a 4,000-polygon, softbody model of Ronald Reagan's head, of all things. Running at around 24 frames per second, the head can be pulled into extreme shapes and then released. The level of elasticity and damping applied then affects its motion as it oscillates





The *HyperMatter 2.0* downloadable demo shows the *3D Max* plug-in's realtime capacities. Ronnie Reagan's face hasn't been so much fun to play with since 'Spitting Image' ended

back around its original shape. But one of the more powerful aspects is subtler. Leave the head static and simply reduce the damping, and the head slowly sinks down under its own weight.

Another demo shows a foam-rubber monster being dropped. Although the impact looks as if it has been scripted – a shockwave travels up the monster's body, throwing its arms upwards – it's just a result of solving the physical equations for a properly modelled shape that has been dropped. This development should make the life of animators much easier, while increasing the realism of ingame characters. "There are so many software dynamical systems that don't look real," argues Craig. "But in *HyperMatter* it actually does." The reason for this is that unlike other approaches which use linear springs, *HyperMatter's* accuracy and stability results from solving the complete Newtonian continuum equations.

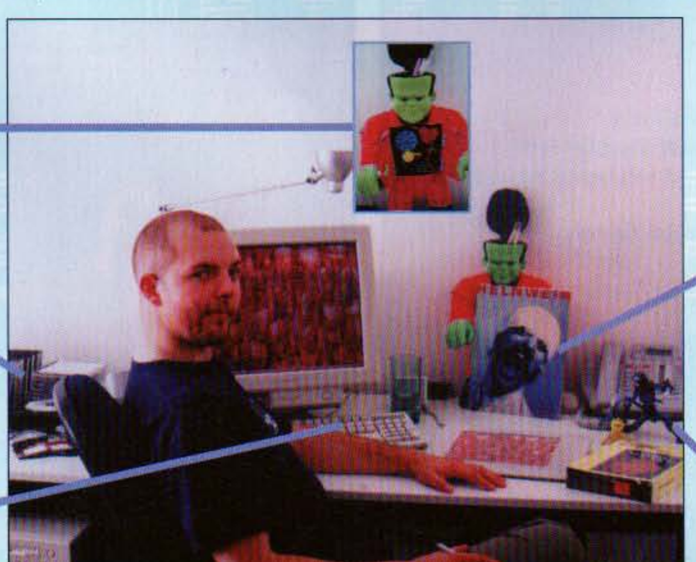
"You can put your characters through *HyperMatter* and get realism for free," says Craig. Once again, the gap between the virtual and real world has grown closer. It's now up to developers to make games that can make use of these new technologies, which afford so much potential.

The Reagan head demo can be downloaded as a 544K Zip file at ***www.hypermatter.demon.co.uk/html/HyperMatter/download/rt_demo_head.zip***



WorkStation

Currently being touted as 'one of the UK's most brilliant *3D Max* animators' – at least by his own company, Computer Artworks – **Karl Wickens** is the lead artist on the genetically modified tactical thirdperson shooter, *Evolva*. His main claim to fame, however, is that he holds the office *Tetris* record: 843 lines in 45 minutes



Big Frank "All the way from America, Big Frank's teenage lobotomy is put to good use thanks to some hinges, ensuring pen organisation is not a problem. Frank's chest also comes apart to reveal removable body parts, and his eyes flash, too"

Bangin' CDs Uncannily, **Edge** is yet to find an office devoid of throbbing drum'n'bass tunes, and this is no exception. 'Hardcore Mission' is the current fave here"

Dali the PC "All the PCs at Computer Artworks are named after famous artists. Mine is Dali. Other luminaries include Goya, Da Vinci and Warhol"

Members of the development community (sane or otherwise) are invited to email WorkStation submissions to **edge@futurenet.co.uk**

Book concerning disturbing German surrealist "Mr Helnwein's leitmotif seems to be a screaming man whose head is wrapped in bandages. He's an inspiration"

Aquatic blue alien One of many US birthday presents, it's attacking the yellow smiley office gimp. "It was stretchy once upon a time," complains Wickens. Now it seems set in some sort of ritualistic bondage position

The trials of a start-up developer: part 11

After co-founding Lionhead Studios with Peter Molyneux, Demis Hassabis set up his own development house, Elixir Studios. In this exclusive diary, he chronicles the trials and tribulations of racing your talent and managing a team, with handbags

Balancing act

"One of the biggest challenges any developer faces is that of how many games to make and when to make them. The problem, as ever, lies in the need to balance monetary and creative considerations.

Having signed their first publishing agreement, many developers put as many games as possible into production. The reason for this is financial insecurity. At any stage a publisher may decide to can your game. As developers rely on their publisher as their only source of income, this can have disastrous consequences. By having a number of games in concurrent production, then, you're clearly reducing this risk. One developer I know of has a tripod system where at any one time they have three games in production. The idea is that if you lose one, the other two will keep the company up.

There are problems with this, though. When a company grows past a certain size, you need a more formal management setup. With a small team you can keep a flat hierarchy, which is great for morale. People aren't so hung up on job roles and are more willing to roll their sleeves up to get things done. One of the things that pleased me most recently was the sight of the entire company helping the office manager to stuff envelopes for a mailout!

Another problem is the speed of growth. To put three projects into production you'll probably need to find 40 to 60 staff in a very short period of time. You can do this, but at a price. Making sure that you recruit the right people is just about the most important thing you'll ever do. Making games is a lifestyle, not a job, and as such you're often holed up with the same people for six days a week, for anything up to 16 hours a day, sometimes under incredibly stressful conditions. To do this successfully you need a tightknit team, preferably consisting of people who get on so well that that they're actually working for each other rather than for themselves or the company. Finding 40 to 60 people of the requisite calibre, and then moulding them into such a team, is extremely difficult – more so if you're trying to do it in a short space of time. It's far better to grow gradually and organically.

Our objective is to keep Elixir at a size of 20 to 25 people for the foreseeable future. We're taking on people at the rate of about one every other month. We're still looking for more, but it's very hard finding the right people. The reason for this is that we're looking for two things in potential team members. First, obviously, they have to be very talented. Second, they've got to have the right attitude, with drive and enthusiasm. I see the relationship between talent and attitude as a little like that of a racing car and its driver. Whereas a good driver can get the most out of an average car (like Schumacher in his first season at Benetton), a poor driver will always underperform, irrespective of the quality of his car (such as David Coulthard in the Maclaren). There are few things I dislike more than wasted talent, which may be symptomatic of my long-suffering devotion to Liverpool FC!

To make matters even harder, the small-team approach means employing people with a range of skills rather than taking specialists. I've found that having people from a range of professional backgrounds has really helped with this. Gavin, our new artist, comes from a comic book background, having previously worked for DC Comics (*Batman* and *Lobo*). Some of his hand-drawn artwork is quite breathtaking, and this skill has been invaluable to us in creating conceptual artwork. He's certainly got the right attitude as well. When asked to describe himself, he said, "I'm good at fighting and have lots of women following me around," which makes me think we were right to take him on; an extravagant imagination is one of the traits I most value in an artist, as is the ability to laugh heartily at oneself!

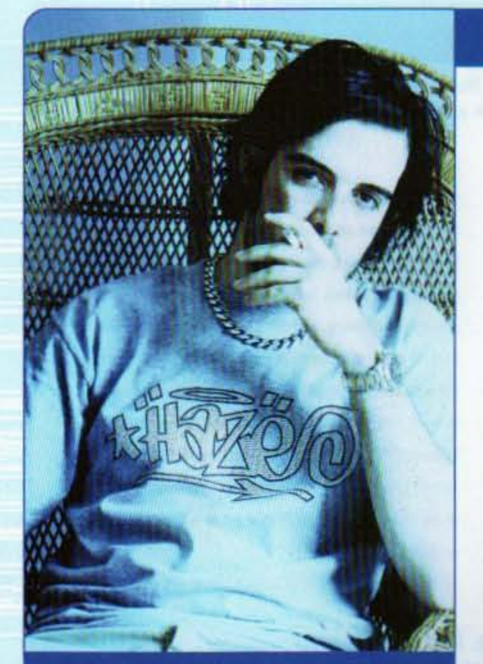
No matter how close a team is, there will always be arguments. Tempers occasionally flare up, and usually it's nothing more than a case of handbags at dawn. Resolving these is one of the harder jobs I do and I've found that adding humour helps enormously. This process has been helped considerably by the acquisition of a rather tasteful pink office handbag which, for added style, was purchased in Skegness. A raised voice is usually greeted by an office-wide cry of "handbags!" The target of this cry is then forced to carry the handbag, slung elegantly across his or her shoulder for the remainder of the day. This never fails to lighten the mood.

"With a small team you can keep a flat hierarchy, which is great for morale. People aren't so hung up on job roles and are more willing to roll their sleeves up to get things done"



When working long hours in a small team, it's vital to maintain a bearable working environment. When tensions run high, Elixir swiftly diffuses them with 'handbags'

On the subject of laughing at oneself, I should tell you about Dynamo Elixir, our five-a-side team, which has recently been seen 'gracing' the Monday night tournament at Spitalfields Market, in London. Our record after two weeks was played six, lost six, scored one, conceded 22. As you can imagine, for a group of people who are obsessed with games, and particularly with winning them, this was a bitter pill to swallow. It's been an excellent experience, though. I've no doubt that at different times over the next few years of development we're going to be up against it. Winning is the easy part – everyone can do that. It's when the chips are down that as a team you succeed or fail, and you only really see what people are made of in adversity. It was in this context that we played our seventh game last Monday night – a real derby against the sheer athleticism of fellow strugglers 'Who Ate All The Pies.' We prevailed 4-1 as the mighty Piemen were swept aside by our own version of Total Football. When it comes down to it, we may not be Brazil, but who knows, we may even achieve mid-table respectability one day. All of which reminds me of something that Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, once said: "Winning isn't everything, but wanting to win is."



Rockstar president Sam Houser is preparing to bring *GTA* the sequel to market. Small wonder he smokes

The trials of a rock'n'roll games publisher: part one

Over the coming months, Brian Baglow, PR manager at Rockstar Games, will be recounting the tricks and traumas of producing a sequel to one of the most successful games in recent years...

Welcome to the first instalment of the *Grand Theft Auto 2* development diary. Over the next few months we hope to show you the raw thrill of creating the follow-up to one of the most original games of the last five years.

Rather than concentrating solely on the development team themselves, we're going to take a peek behind the big, red curtains of Rockstar Games and show you just what a publisher has to go through to bring a major game like *GTA2* on to the market. Apologies in advance if this shatters any sort of Willy Wonka fantasies you might have about games creation – it's a filthy business.

First of all, a word about the original game. Hitting the High Street in Christmas '97, *GTA* was a fabulous top-down driving game set inside three massive cities. The player had the freedom to drive anywhere, use any car and pretty much rip it up and have large amounts of fun. The cities were 'living', too – everything was active, where pedestrians, other road users and people are going about their daily business. And if, during the course of your day, you happened to break the law, the police would be on your back in a second. Ambulances tended to the sick and injured, and the fire department would come and put out any cars or buildings you may have set on fire. It was kind of cool.

But how do you create a sequel for a game like *GTA*? It would be so easy to do it *badly* – the whole industry thrives on franchises. Even the most undeserving games have sequel after sequel pumped out, most of which amount to nothing more than a new set of levels and, if you're lucky, a nicer hairdo, worth £40 of anyone's cash. However, we have a secret weapon – a complete design for a new *GTA* game that we completed shortly after we finished the first game.

You see, creating the first game was an adventure in itself. If you're developing a well-understood type of game – football, for example – you know how everything works, you know the rules of the game, you know how the players should move and how the ball should react. You can work towards a known goal. If you're doing something entirely new, however, you may not know where you want to end up. You know how you want it to play, but there can be a lot of grey areas.

While we were developing *Grand Theft Auto*, there were a lot of ideas, concepts and missions that we just couldn't fit into the game. This was mostly down to time pressure or limits of the technology we were using to create the game. Being seasoned games pros, we didn't just curse loudly and throw the whole lot away. No. We kept them in anticipation. So, the idea was to use the original game simply as a template – discuss it, find out what worked and what didn't, which bits people liked the best and, if possible, find out why they liked them. If we could get this information down, we could decide exactly what we wanted to put in *GTA2*.

Of course, while the white-hot flame of pure creation was burning brightly at DMA, at Rockstar Games in New York other problems were raising their heads.

The success of *GTA* means that hopes are high for the sequel. *GTA* reached number one and has so far spent almost 80 weeks in the top 20. *GTA2* takes the depth and gameplay of the original and expands upon it in every way. The original game quickly gained a huge underground following. A fiercely loyal, almost fanatical audience who created their own Websites (72 at the peak) dedicated to the game and started *GTA*'s very own newsgroup – **alt.games.grand-theft-auto**. This is kind of an unusual situation for a game. Games are often popular – characters from games can be extremely popular – but never before had we seen such a tightknit devoted group as the *GTA* fans. The challenge of creating the sequel will be to move the game forward, improving the gameplay, depth and freedom within the game, while remaining true to the original vision. The alternative is to sell out – do some new levels and grab as much cash as you can before you kill the game stone dead.

Sam Houser, president of Rockstar (and executive producer of both *GTA* and *GTA2*) is responsible overall for *GTA2* reaching the market – and making it as good as it possibly can be. He has to deal with the problems that the game faces, both in development and in the marketplace.

Right now he's a little busy. Rockstar decided to create a live-action movie, which would show off all the cool bits which will eventually end up in the game. "We did a similar kind of thing a couple of years ago for the original game," says Houser. "We shot the movie in black and white, deliberately kept it kind of abstract from the game. Everyone shows off game footage when they want to create a piece of film for a game. Nobody seems to think along the lines of music videos. Doing something that little bit different. And something which has a bit of style." The new film is set in New York. It's not a low-budget people-from-the-office-during-lunch-break kind of thing, either – this movie has a proper cast, with Russians, Yakuza and Krishnas, a real director, car chases, helicopter shots and stuntmen. Cool.

The filming has to be completed in time for E3 – editing and all. And Houser's suffering: "Two of my Yakuza haven't shown up. The NYPD are here in force after someone reported a gang fight, and Terry [Donovan, Rockstar's marketing director, who's playing a Hare Krishna in the film] has just had his nose burst open with a fake baseball bat."

Back at the Rockstar offices there's no time to relax. "One of the major problems we have," admits Houser, "is how the game is perceived in different countries – by the press and by the various ratings boards. We don't want the game to be banned, but we don't want to have to cut or censor it at all if possible." To this end, the New York office sets up a major conference. Representatives from every Take 2 office around the world are invited, along with Colin MacDonald and Dave Jones from DMA. For almost everyone, this is their first chance to see the new game engine running.

As MacDonald loads the game and shows everybody the new engine running with about 120 pedestrians on screen at once, you can see people start to grin. The pedestrians are all on the move, popping to the shops for a dozen rolls, waiting for a bus, shouting at a taxi, getting mugged, or just generally hanging around outside a shop doorway (well, it's a dodgy part of town). The roads and freeways are moving with cars; almost 60 different vehicles can be onscreen at once. After throwing around a few petrol bombs and zapping a couple of dozen innocent bystanders with a Tazer, the cops start to appear, followed by SWAT teams, then… is that the army? It's clear that this is not just another sequel.

The rest of the meeting covers all the groovy bits that publishers know and love – packaging, marketing, localisation and advertising. We want to emphasise that *GTA2* is different. We want to stay away from the usual rendered box covers and stereotyped images. Houser sums it up: "We want to bring a bit of music industry sensibility to the games market. I think people are ready for a bit of style. *GTA2* is going to be just as innovative, just as original and just as much fun as the original. It's going to be huge. Anyone who disagrees will be destroyed."

"The challenge of creating the sequel will be to move the game forward, improving the gameplay, depth and freedom within the game, while remaining true to the original vision. The alternative is to sell out – do some new levels and grab as much cash as you can"



Photography: **Nick Wilson**

THE BITMAP BROTHERS

THE FOREFATHERS OF VIDEOGAMING COOL, THE BITMAP PARTNERSHIP SEEMED TO HAVE THE MIDAS TOUCH. HALLOWED BY GAMERS AND REVERED BY THE INDUSTRY, THEIR IMAGE HAS ENDURED. BUT WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Few development teams have cultivated their image as much as The Bitmap Brothers, and still fewer have had as much talent to go with the posturing. From the signature metallic sheen they gave to their graphics, to the pioneering use of real soundtracks in games (Bomb The Bass's reworked John Carpenter's 'Assault On Precinct 13' music for *Xenon 2*), everything about the Bitmaps was distinctive. Still best known for the *Xenon* shoot 'em ups and the *Speedball* future sports series, it seemed the Bitmaps could always be relied on to deliver fast, highly playable arcade games.

But not recently. A couple of less than stellar titles (*Magic Pockets*, *The Chaos Engine*), an unsuccessful move into self-publishing via the Renegade label, and the underwhelming reception of *Z* three years ago all served to dull the Bitmaps' lustre. But this year will see the release of not one but two new Bitmap Brothers titles – both sequels – so **Edge** took the opportunity to visit its Wapping HQ to catch up with MD **Mike Montgomery**.

Edge: What happened to the Bitmap Brothers? Have you lost it?

Mike Montgomery: Lost what? [Laughs]

Edge: You've been very quiet for the last five years – there's been just one or two titles. What's happened?

MM: What's happened for the last five years? I think you need to understand that when a development house stays small as we have – and the development cycle takes longer – you don't tend to get so many products out as we used to.

Edge: Is that down to technology changing, because you were so prolific when you started out?

MM: Yeah, we were prolific, but that's when we were working with smaller teams and smaller budgets on formats that were simpler to develop for. I mean, the difference between developing an Amiga game and developing a PC game now, well, the development cycle is probably two, three or four times as large.

Edge: So how come you didn't expand when everybody else expanded, going from the Amiga to the PlayStation and PC?

MM: Well, I think we didn't really expand because we believe in a small group of people working on a top product rather than [having more people] working on something that wouldn't be top-dollar.

Edge: Is it still possible for a small team to create stuff that's up there with the best now?

MM: Yeah. I wouldn't say that we were a small team – we've got roughly 15 people working for us now, so that's not really small – but we are only developing one product at a time. We did work on more than one product at one time back in the Amiga days, but we felt that the problem with that was that one product suffered. We had one really good product and one... uh, not quite-so-good product.

Edge: How do you define The Bitmap Brothers now, compared to your heyday?

MM: Well, I don't think we've gone past our heyday. I don't think we've left the heyday – I think we're still here. I think The Bitmap Brothers are still a very high-profile development company. The problem is, if you're not producing a game every year, people tend to forget that you're actually there. But we're working on stuff all the time.



"I think **The Bitmap Brothers are still a very high-profile** development company. The problem is, if you're not producing a game every year, people tend to forget that you're actually there. **But we're working on stuff all the time**" Mike Montgomery

Edge: But you're not producing stuff for the latest consoles, which again lowers your profile.

MM: Yeah, maybe it does lower the profile. We decided a few years ago, when we were developing *Z*, that we would concentrate on the PC market at the time. Quite honestly, we didn't find it any trouble developing for it, but I think the



problem was that we got into it at the point when the PC was changing quite dramatically. *Z* was originally a title that was going to come out on floppy disks, then all of a sudden CD-ROM became big and so we had to put more into *Z*, like cut-scenes, because that's what everyone was doing to fill the CD up and give it a higher perceived value. And, of course, keeping up with technology makes the development cycle that bit longer.

Edge: But the development cycle now is something like two years for a game, and in that time the whole iteration of PCs has changed. You must be constantly chasing your tail...

MM: I don't believe that's true. There's not such a big a jump as going from floppy to CD-ROM. Okay, there's DVD coming out, but I don't think that's going to be really that big in the PC market just yet. The main challenges on the PC at the moment are 3D boards. All of a sudden we're on the third generation of PC cards and they've all gone in different directions. Once again this presents a problem.

Off limits

Edge: When you started out you did *Speedball* and *Xenon*, which really were very generic games but were the best of their genres – you went as far as you could with them. Why aren't you doing that with the PC now, taking on the firstperson shooter genre or the realtime strategy genre?

MM: Well, we're taking on the realtime strategy genre with... [Catches himself] Uh, I can't really talk about *Z2* [laughs]. I think what a lot of people don't realise is that we've actually been developing our own 3D engine for about four-and-a-half years, as research and development, from the time we were doing *Z*, so that when we came to do



the *Speedball 2* concept using the technology that people expect from a PlayStation game. So, it's in a 3D environment but because it's such a good game, and really liked by people, we're sticking to particular camera angles very similar to the Amiga version. The most important thing, I believe, in any product that's in development, is the gameplay.

Therefore, what we're trying to achieve is to produce *Speedball 2* on the PlayStation with as much playability as the original, if not more. *Speedball 2* is only 90 seconds a side. It's fast and furious, with a really simple interface – you can go down the pub and get pissed and come back and just play against your mates.

Edge: What about all the changes that have happened to sports sims in the past few years – aspects such as motion capture and multiple cameras?

MM: The thing is, this is a futuristic sports game. It isn't football, it isn't rugby, it isn't basketball. It's a game that we actually invented – there are very few rules in it. A lot of football games are getting very real – they're almost trying to reproduce the Sky TV coverage. We're just trying to do a really playable game.

"Z was originally **a title that was going to come out on floppy disks,** then CD-ROM became big and so we had to put more into it, like cut-scenes, because that's what **everyone was doing** to fill the CD up **and give it a higher perceived value"**

something in 3D we had an engine that was usable and had a headstart on the development cycle.

Edge: And is that what you're using on *Z2*?

MM: [Laughs] I'm sorry, did you say *Z2*? I don't recall the name? [Publisher GT doesn't want the Bitmaps to talk about *Z2* developments at this early stage].

Edge: Why are you going back to what you've done before with both *Z2* and the forthcoming *Speedball 2100*?

MM: *Speedball 2100*, that's an interesting one. That's actually being developed in another office outside London by a group of guys who've done PlayStation stuff before. It'll be interesting for me because – going back to what I said earlier about not wanting to develop two products at one time – we're doing it externally although it's owned by The Bitmap Brothers. There's none of this, 'Oh, we're a bit behind on this one so we'll move these resources to this,' because that's where games suffer and where the development cycle takes longer. And people don't like working like that. They want to see something through to the end and not get shifted around.

Edge: So how have gone about going back to this ten-year-old idea? What have you brought to it?

MM: I think what we're trying to achieve is to get

Edge: But won't the audience expect what they've been conditioned to by the many *FIFA*s of this world?

MM: That's an interesting question. I don't really know. I think it's a different market.

The 64bit question

Edge: The way one perceives your games, even now, is that they're almost 8bit games in terms of simplicity – which is not necessarily a bad thing. But you're now dealing with a market with 64bit and 128bit consoles and the perception of what a videogame should be has changed from when *Speedball 1* and *2* came out. How do you think that will that affect *Speedball 2100*'s reception?

MM: This could be an interesting point. All of a sudden you see the revival of *Frogger*. You see that Activision is producing a few other [similar] titles on the PlayStation and is doing very well.

Edge: But are its games doing as well as the *Half-Lifes* and the *Quakes* and the *Command & Conquers*?

MM: Being a development house isn't all about doing firstperson-perspective shooters. It's not, 'Let's take a *Quake* engine and make a game using that.' I think that we enjoy developing games





that we want to play and we think, by doing that, people will want to play them as well.

Edge: So is anybody else developing games that you want to play? What do you like that's out there now?

MM: What do I like, personally? What am I playing? *Zelda* on the Game Boy, actually, which is really infuriating. And also, I know this is an oldish title, but *Final Fantasy VII*. It's a really nice game, the graphics are really good in it. It's that typical, cutesy Japanese storyline which is quite interesting.

Edge: They're both very simple games.

MM: They are and they're not. I'm struggling with *Zelda* but that could be because I've lost the instruction book. *Final Fantasy*, yeah, it's simple but you get quite involved.

Edge: They don't seem to be technological games. You seem to be against new technology for the sake of it in videogames. Is that right?

MM: No, I think you have to use the technology that's there, but to a certain extent. What do kids spend all their time watching at home? Old cartoons. They could be watching the more modern cartoons with computer graphics but they seem to get more out of the old cartoons.

Yes, technology does make a difference. But even then, I think that for the majority of people who enjoy a game, it's the gameplay rather than the technology that really makes the difference. To be fair, nowadays there are more and more games coming out with the technology, that do contain the gameplay which, five years ago, probably wasn't the case.

Brotherly love

Edge: Ten years ago you were setting trends that everyone else has since picked up on. You were using pop musicians for a soundtrack, you were the first 'celebrity' programmers with a high profile, interested in talking to the media. That seems to have a been a template for how the games industry has developed in the last ten years. How do you feel about that?

MM: I think it's a huge compliment. At the time we decided to do some of these things, we looked at the industry and thought that most of these people were working in bedrooms and garages and were spotty. Nowadays, we're getting closer to pop stars. There are parallels between development houses and pop groups – they're selling to the same people – and in some cases, games outsell pop records.

Edge: Do you think you've kept your fans?

MM: Definitely. And what I'm hoping for with *Speedball 2100* is to bring in a new set of fans that are of a younger age, a generation younger than most of our fans are at the moment.

Edge: Looking at the publishing side of things, as you've stayed developing one product at a time, has that made it harder to strike publishing deals?

MM: I don't really know. How can I compare that to something when I've only developed single products for the last two years?

Edge: But you've had no problems getting a publisher?

MM: Oh, everyone has problems getting a publisher. [Laughs] I think it's getting very, very difficult for independent developers to find good publishers. The problem with publishers is that they're getting smaller in number and bigger in size. And they're also tying themselves into, what shall I say, not-quite-so-independent developers.

Edge: And that consolidation of power you've described, you don't think it's a good thing for the games industry?

MM: It's a difficult one to answer. In some respects, no, I don't think it is, but in some respects I do. The problem is, development is continually going to rise in cost as new technology comes out, and if the publishers were too small they wouldn't be able to afford the development costs they've got to pay out.



"Nowadays, **we're getting closer to pop stars.** There are parallels between development houses and pop groups – they're selling to the same people – **and in some cases, games outsell** pop records"

Edge: And you've had to restructure The Bitmap Brothers to cope with the changing situation?

MM: We have restructured the company, but for different reasons. My two partners, Eric Matthews and Steve Kelly, decided that they wanted to concentrate on games and not management. We found that as the team got bigger, more and more of our time was spent doing management than at what we were really good at – developing games.

It was a joint decision that I would take over the company and that Eric and Steve would work for me and therefore relieve them from all the management pressures and financial pressures that go with them.

Edge: That sounds like the Peter Molyneux principle. Getting away from management, getting back to making games...

MM: Yeah. When you've got talents like my ex-partners, it's a real waste involving them in too much management. They're very creative and should be doing creative things.

Edge: Were they not tempted to go off on their own and do individual projects?

MM: No, not at all. The working relationship is probably better now than what it was. Realistically, we're probably a lot closer together than we were three years ago. They're doing what they want to do and what they enjoy doing... and I'm getting the shit. [Laughs] No, don't quote me on that. Don't get me wrong, I'm enjoying it as well. I'm still managing to get in a few days a week programming, though it's getting harder and harder. But I also enjoy running things.







Gallery

The art of the videogame





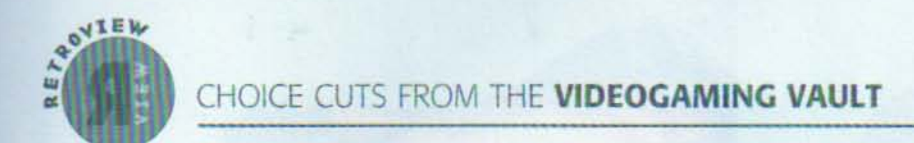






Rallying is something of a popular sub-genre at the moment, and Europress is about to pitch in its contribution in the form of *Rally Championship*. Boasting the Mobil 1 British Rally Championship licence, developer Magnetic Fields (home of legendary 8bit coder Shaun Southern, responsible for *Kikstart*, among many other titles) has had access to hundreds of photographs and accurate measurements in order to recreate each car's livery and design. The Seat Ibiza Cupra Sport model (top) consists of 130,000 polys.

Images rendered by artist **Andrew Bolt** at Magnetic Fields, using *Lightwave 3D* on a PII 400MHz PC with 320Mb RAM and 16Gb HD



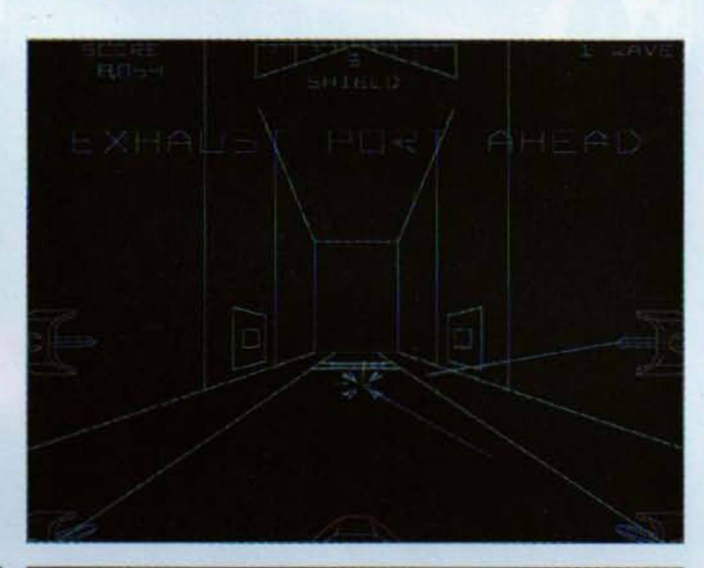
STARWARS

As 'Phantom Menace' merchandise reaches the point of saturation, Edge looks back at a forgivably exploitative piece of spin-off material from the early '80s which evoked the feel of 'Star Wars' so much more than any tacky plastic figurine

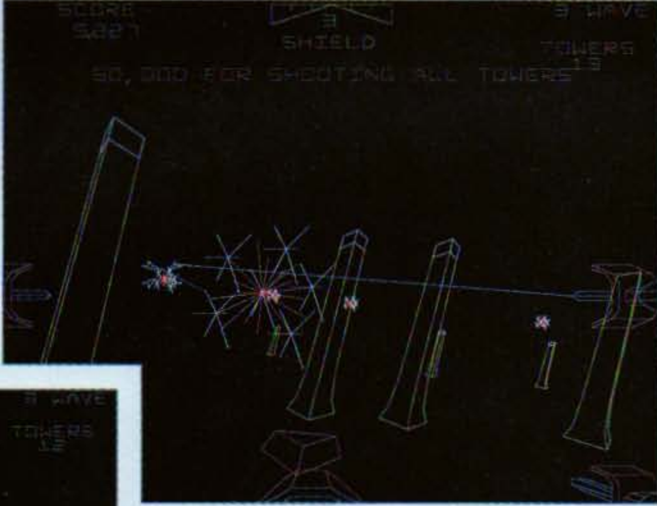
Whenever the topic of 'favourite coin-op ever' comes up in discussion between many of today's leading game designers, Atari's 1983 vector graphics-driven shoot 'em up extravaganza, *Star Wars*, inevitably crops up.

Crucially, however, this is not simply 'Star Wars' movie nostalgia talking; the game stood tall in its own right as an example of immersive action gaming. Its coloured, full 3D world was more convincing than that of precursor *Battlezone*, while its soundtrack, a fair rendition of John Williams' original peppered with authentic speech samples, contributed towards building what was, for its time, the closest thing to 'being there' imaginable.

Star Wars may have attempted to simulate merely a slice of its source material, but this was in fact one of its strengths. By not spreading the movie's obvious potential too thinly, Atari created a legend whose influence on future space-based titles is undeniable.









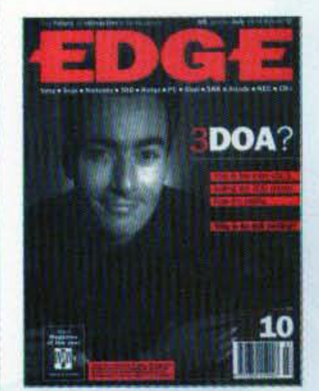


Approaching the Death Star (top left), you knew that the action was about to begin hotting up. Sure enough, the trench sequence (above) – preceded by surface skims (centre right) on later levels – formed the focal point of the game (even if it was to prove disappointingly easy)

Manufacturer: Atari	1983	Developer: In-house	Coin-op

EDGE VIEW

The videogame world never stands still, riding the breaking wave of advancing technology. In this regular column Edge puts the industry's progress in perspective with a look at yesteryear's headlines: five years ago this month



Edge issue ten, July 1994



Panasonic's Real Interactive Multiplayer: the first iteration of Trip Hawkins' 3DO dream

In one of only two instances which saw an industry figure appearing on its cover (the other being issue 43), the July '94 **Edge** sought to discover where the ex-EA supremo was planning to take his 3DO standard next, following its less-than-convincing performance to date. An opinionated interview revealed that a successor was already in the works, and that Trip Hawkins believed that 'in around five years from now, a standalone CD system will be so much more powerful than a PC for playing games. It will be so inexpensive that the idea of playing games on a PC – well, nobody would care about doing that any more.' Hmm.

A press release from Nintendo's Kyoto HQ was enough to get **Edge**'s reporters worked up into a two-page lather over a 32bit successor to the SNES. Known as Project Reality, the machine's first three titles will be versions of *Metroid*, *F-Zero* and *Zelda*, according to the story.

In other news, Sega Europe's Mike Brogan declares his commitment to add-on technology in the form of Mars (eventually known as 32X). 'I can't say you'll get an arcade perfect conversion [of *Virtua Racer*],' he says, 'but it'll certainly be getting there.' Sure.









One of the first Japanese 3DO titles (top left). Nintendo reveals plans for a new 32bit-based format (top right). Jez San (above left) speaks about Argonaut's BRender technology. Jeff Minter and a good friend

Did they really say that?

'We're fairly comfortable that our next generation hardware will blow anything those guys are doing out of the water!' – **Trip Hawkins**, talking about never-to-be-seen console, M2

Did Edge really say that?

From a Viewpoint reply: 'If you want a mag that's critical and impartial, you can't complain when it tells the truth about a machine you happen to own.' Talk about what goes around…

Testscreens (and ratings)

SOS (SNES; 7/10), *Pacific Strike* (PC; 8/10), *Super Wing Commander* (3DO; 7/10), *Heavenly Symph'y* (MCD; 4/10), *The 7th Guest* (CDi; 5/10), *Windjammers* (Neo Geo; 5/10)

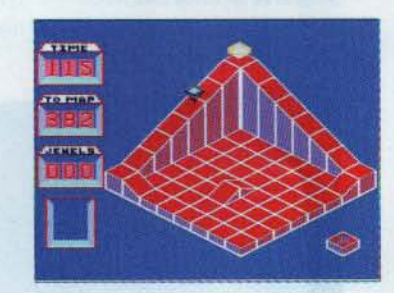
PIXEL PERFECT

Every gamer has occasional moments of sparkling excitement, be it the first time *Speedball* booted up, or completing *Sabrewulf*. Here, programmer Glenn Corpes of Lost Toys remembers a 'perfect simulation' and his utter devotion to it

"I loved *Spindizzy* from the first time I saw a screenshot in an Amstrad CPC mag. Isometric games had, of course, been done before, but they were always monochrome Spectrum ports. *Spindizzy* used four glorious colours at a massive 320x200 resolution.

The game itself was awesome, a perfect simulation – admittedly a simulation of a spinning top in a world that consisted of just slopes, lifts, trampolines, switches and jumps, but a perfect simulation nonetheless. You had only 110 seconds (for some reason a *Spindizzy* second was three seconds long) to pick up 384 gems placed around 400 levels. Luckily, you were awarded ten 'seconds' for each gem you picked up, giving you around three hours to finish it, something I actually sat down and did after many weeks of practice. The game had to be finished in one go, too, because there was no save game feature. I was still very into the game several years later, as can be seen if you look at the graphics and isometric engine of *Populous* too closely.

I finally met the author Paul Shirley last year and told him I'd finished the game. He accused me of cheating. I swore that I hadn't, and he told me I was a sad bastard."



Though a puzzle game in some respects, *Spindizzy* was as much a *Marble Madness* clone as anything else. Corpes' CPC version has the slight edge over the C64 port (above)





Fujifilm MX-2700 Digital Camera

■ *£600 ■ Contact 0171 586 9000

The digital camera may be a marvellous toy to brag about down the local, but the truth is that no matter how cool it looks, there is no way it can compete with good old-fashioned 35mm for sheer quality. Or so conventional wisdom had it up until Fuji launched its 2.3-megapixel camera.

Diddier than Ken Dodd's diminutive buddies, the tiny MX-2700 packs in 1,800x1,200-resolution shots that use the same 3:2 aspect ratio as 35mm film. The results, when printed on glossy photo paper, are remarkably good, blowing up to A4 size with hardly any loss in quality. Another bonus is the fact that Fuji has opted to power its 2.3-megapixel marvel with lithium-ion rechargeable batteries, which means that once the two-inch LCD and host of flashing lights has drained the camera, there's no need to fork out for new batteries – just squeeze some juice back into the old ones again.

The MX-2700's only shortcoming is the lack of optical zoom, a sacrifice made to keep the camera tiny, but even that doesn't detract from the fact that until someone trundles out a three-million-pixel snapper, there is finally a digital camera that can give 35mm compacts a run for their money.







Arcam Alpha 10 Digital Tuner

■ *£800 ■ Contact: 01223 203203

If anyone tries to tell you that radio is a thing of the past, be sure to give them a slap: Arcam's Alpha 10 Digital Radio Tuner has pulled the old wireless kicking and screaming into the next century and is capable to the point of almost being able to make tedious breakfast show belle Zoë Ball sound bearable.

This monumental task has been achieved by chucking crackly FM out of the window and embracing Digital Audio Broadcasting. It proves a breeze to set up: merely press the auto-tune button and lo and behold the Alpha 10 will find all available stations and neatly slot them into order. The set also features six preset buttons that allow you to find your favourite services with one touch.

While the Alpha's overall design isn't much to write home about – which doesn't help to justify the exorbitant price tag – its sound quality is something else. You'll be surprised just how crappy normal FM sounds once your ears have been treated to DAB. The crystal clear audio enables you to hear the slightest detail, from the producer shuffling papers to the DJ picking his nose. It's just a shame that at £800, the set will surely only become a must-have for serious radio fanatics.





* These are typical High Street prices, accurate at time of going to press. Manufacturers are no longer obliged to provide recommended retail prices on certain consumer electronics products.

Motorola 9500 Satellite Series Mobile Phone

■ *£1,995 ■ Contact 0500 555555

One of the joys of travelling around this fair globe is that as you trudge through the Amazon jungle you know there is no way your mum can ring you to ask if you're wearing a clean pair of cecks. Unless, of course, you've got your hands on Motorola's new Satellite phone, which means that once connected to BT's Iridium subscription service you can be contacted wherever you are on earth. Well, that's the idea, at least. To get a connection, you need to be situated somewhere where the phone can easily find one of the many satellites currently spinning around in orbit, and, unfortunately, heavily built-up areas can easily block the signal. And be warned, this pretty damn huge handset has similarly massive charges involved. With a one-minute call setting you back about £1.30, this isn't a gadget for yakkers. It's possible to plug in a GSM module to switch between satellite and regular mobile services, but unless you know that you're travelling somewhere that hasn't a single phone within thousands of miles and you'll definitely need to keep in touch, there's no point handing over two grand for this monster.



Palm V

■ *£350 ■ Contact 0118 927 8200

A few years back you would have found it hard to believe that the Palm Pilot could ever be improved and, indeed, the next two versions of the PDA hardly made much difference. However, the Palm V has changed all that. Gone is the chunky, grey casing, the V sporting a rather fetching brushed aluminised plastic on its oh-so-slim form. With a width measuring less than half an inch, the new model boasts an LCD that can be clearly viewed from any angle and includes a backlight enabling you to keep working in pitch blackness.

Easily linked to your PC by slamming the PDA into its docking cradle and hitting the HotSync button, the Palm V's 2Mb of memory can cope with up to 6,000 addresses, 1,500 memos, 200 emails, 1,500 to-do lists and five years' worth of appointments. Entering information is handled by either bringing an on-screen keyboard or getting your head around the Graffiti handwriting recognition software, which allows you to simply write on screen, albeit in a stylised manner that takes a little time to learn. To coin a cliché, the best has definitely just got better.



Edge has attempted to state prices wherever possible, but for up-to-the-minute information, check adverts in the national press or contact your local consumer electronics dealer.



Seeing the sights in LA

US: The Electronics Entertainment Expo is all about videogames, of course, but exhibitors do not expect visitors to be content with mere playable demos of their forthcoming products. No, they serve up all manner of peripheral guff, from that enduring favourite, the slab of hired totty, to tottering unfortunates sweating it out within the confines of game-character costumes. And then there are the parties (but that's another story). Some highlights from this year, then…









A rather tired, ragged-looking Sonic was joined by an enthusiastic, likeably deluded Pac-Man in the 'look at me, I'm cute' department but both were upstaged by the cuddliest Pikachu you'll ever see. Nintendo also used inspirationally customised VW Beetles, which nipped around downtown Los Angeles, to further promote what is becoming its biggest game franchise

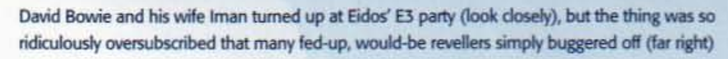










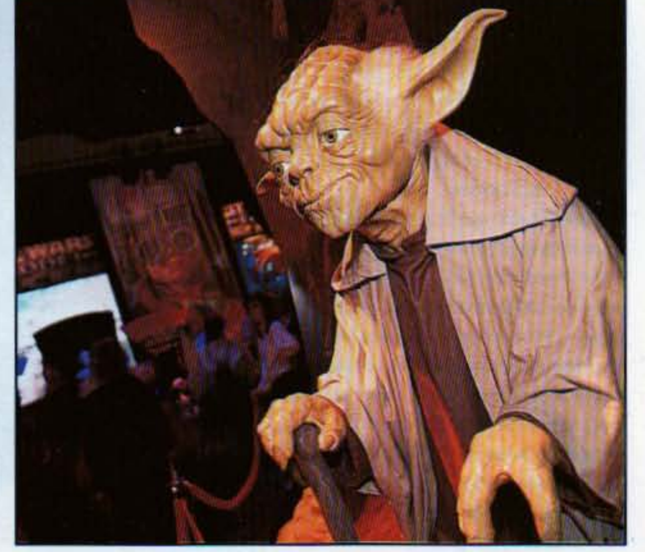


David Bowie and his wife Iman turned up at Eidos' E3 party (look closely), but the thing was so ridiculously oversubscribed that many fed-up, would-be revellers simply buggered off (far right)

In terms of decorating stands with stuff actually worth stopping to look at, few exhibitors came close to Nintendo, which had a number of 'Phantom Menace' characters on display to accompany *Episode 1 Racer*. Sure, the characters themselves might be tedium incarnate in the movie, but the modelling detail at E3 was exquisite



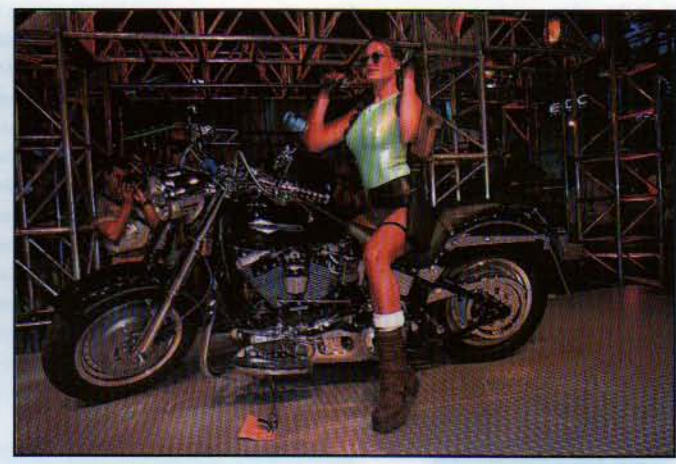














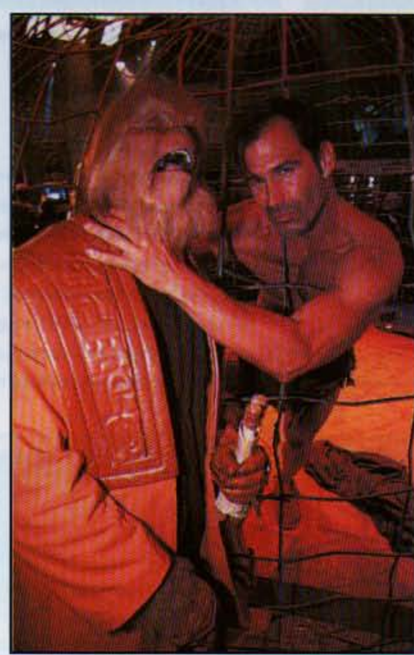


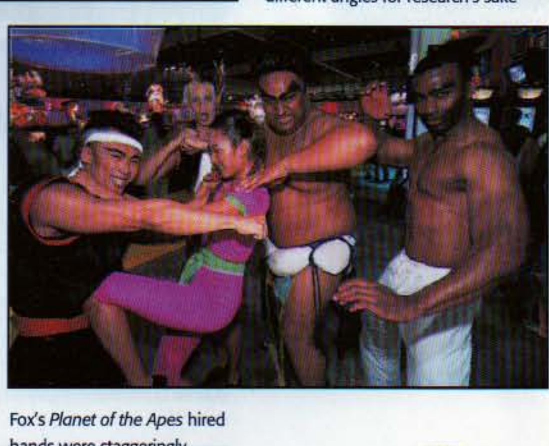


As usual, geeks waited patiently to have their pictures taken with the girls draped over various stands, although a few seemed more interested in meeting some old wrestler or other (above). Lara Weller, meanwhile, was on hand as the new 'real' Lara Croft. **Edge**'s lensman got a couple of different angles for research's sake









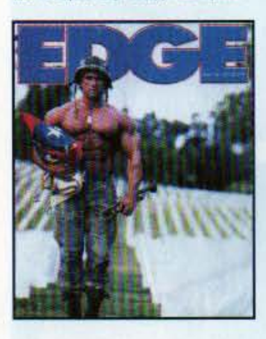
Fox's *Planet of the Apes* hired hands were staggeringly authentic (but then you'd expect them to be after *four hours* of pre-show make-up each morning). Sega's *VF3tb* characters were, er, rather less convincing, while EA's huge *Dungeon Keeper II* geezer (far left) was one of E3's shockers





Over the edge

US: Despite obvious logo similarities, the publication below (picked up at a Santa Monica bookstore during **Edge**'s recent visit to LA for E3) isn't a licensed version of the magazine you're reading right now, nor is it a *Soldier of Fortune*-style periodical dedicated to individuals with a penchant for warfare. No, *EDGE* is in fact a leading west cost publication dedicated to the gay male community (sample feature title: 'A Day for Gay Poetry'). How queer.



And the winner is...

UK: Back in **E**70, you had the chance to win one of three VideoLogic DVD Player cards bundled with an Hitachi DVD-ROM drive by writing in and telling **Edge** which DVD region Japan falls under. The answer, of course, is region 2, and the prizes will be winging their way to winners Simon Carter in Chester, Michael Cumpton in St Ives and Wan Shahreza in Brickendon, Herts. Enjoy.

Slighted Shenmue still simmering

Japan: Although, as a project, *Shenmue*'s progress has been difficult to assess (the game put in a generally strong appearance at the Tokyo Game Show, but visitors viewing it at E3 were distinctly unimpressed), Sega is maintaining momentum on its much-anticipated title in Japan. The company's latest promotional concept was *Shenmue Forest*, held during the Network Jungle 2 Digital Island convention, in which Sega created a real-life *Shenmue* environment, mixing banks of video screens with trees, mist and paintings of the game's characters. Yu Suzuki was also on hand to explain his vision.

Various challenges were set up for the public, including a Free Time event, which involved clearing a stage of 50 opponents within two minutes, and three Quick Time events. The first of these highlighted a battle with seven enemies in a warehouse, the second an encounter with a drunk that also ended in a fight, and the last a training event in which Ryo is taught a high-kick move from a breakdancer called Tom.

Elsewhere in the forest, the *Shenmue* shop was bulging with game merchandise, including T-shirts and the *Shenmue* Orchestra album, even though the first game disc isn't released until August 5. But it's clear that Sega cannot afford to let the game slip any more. Small wonder that the entire AM2 department has been mobilised to get it finished on time. Fifty-one days and counting...









Part forest, part stately home, the latest *Shenmue* event mixed fake plastic trees with video screens

Putting a face to a voice

Japan: Nipponese mobile-comms fans (and that's much of the population) have famously been able to purchase cellular phones the size of matchboxes for some years now, but a feature more exciting than mere diminutiveness has recently been introduced by Japanese electronics giant Tuku. With the company's new gadget, dubbed La Pochee, users can take photos (of a quality similar to that of Nintendo's Game Boy Camera) and send them to their similarly teched-up friends once the unit has been attached to a compatible mobile phone.

No price has yet been announced, but as other manufacturers, such as NTT, are getting in on the act, the marketing suits in Japan must believe that the market for La Pochee is ready to explode.







Who knows? We may even see a version of La Pochee here in the UK. In about ten years' time

DataStream

Percentage of parents in a US survey who said they looked at age ratings before buying or renting a game: **40%**
Number of units sold in Japan by Nintendo in 1998 to become the biggest software developer: **7m**
Number of units sold in Japan by Konami in 1998: **6.5m**
Number of units sold in Japan by SquareSoft in1998: **6.1m**
Amount it costs to build an Internet brand, according to the *New York Times*: **$50-100m**
Nintendo's predicted operating profits for financial year ending March 31: **$1.3bn**
Sony Computer Entertainment's operating profit for 1998: **$1.1bn**
Sega's losses for 1998: **$378m**
Percent growth of Eidos since 1995, making it the fastest-growing technology company in the UK: **29,637%**
Amount a 13-year-old bid using his mother's credit card on online auction site eBay: **$3.1m**
Cost of repairing arch-hacker Kevin Mitnick's mischief, as predicted by the companies he targeted: **$300m**
Percentage of the handheld market taken by Nintendo's Game Boy systems: **99%**
ROM size of *Resident Evil 2* N64 cartridge: **512 megabit**
Percentage of total European games sold in UK and Ireland: **39%**
Percentage of total European games sold in Germany: **29%**
Percentage of total European games sold in France: **18%**
Amount EA intends to spend worldwide to establish a *Formula 1* franchise: **$10m**
Number of next-generation PlayStation titles that Sony claims to be currently working on: **30**
Percentage drop in Japanese household spending in 1998: **1.3%**
Number of copies of *Donkey Kong 64* Nintendo predicts it will sell in the first six weeks of the game's release: **2.5m**





Monster mish-mash

Japan: Credited with keeping the N64 afloat in its home territory, as well as easing the rise of Game Boy, Nintendo has much to thank its Pokémon fanbase for. Cue a strong company presence at the 1999 Pokémon Festival, where it announced the latest titles in the series: *Pocket Monster Stadium 2*, which will be released in June, and *Pocket Monsters Gold* and *Silver*. Fans spent their time at the festival browsing through a number of themed areas. Entitled *Pokémon Snap, Pokémon Stadium, Pokémon Pinball* and *Pokémon Tournament*, helpful Nintendo game girls demonstrated the titles, with Game Boy title *Pinball* proving a particular favourite. Other highlights included the unveiling of a twin-seater Pikachu car and a Pocket Monster adoption service (presumably to deal with any unwanted cuddly toys).

If the Pokémon concept once looked like being a flash in the pan, this event illustrated its transition from cult to major-scale movement.





When the little terrors weren't listening intently to one of Nintendo's presentations, they were fighting each other or pondering purchases

Net spawns Virtual School

Japan: While hacking around with PCs still comes second best to console gaming as a national pastime for the Japanese, bedroom coding remains a real underground force. As if to prove this point, a group of high school students has developed a massively multiplayer online game. Although the title will not be made commercially available, its developers hope to host up to 8,000 players at a time. And the nature of the game? Well, being high school students, the collective has developed *Virtual High School*, in which you select a student of either sex and go on to enjoy attending virtual classes. In some respects it's not unlike Konami's *Tokimeki Memorial*, but the online angle gives it more credibility than most fan-produced fodder of this ilk.




Namco plays arty dodger

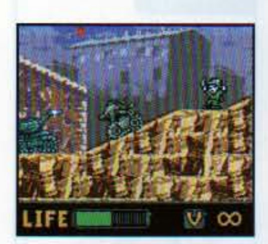
Japan: Despite having been on test in select locations for a little while now, Namco refuses to release screenshots of its latest realisation of the cash cow that is *Tekken*. If early reports are to be believed, though, the best thing about *Tekken Tag Tournament* is not its gameplay (Namco has simply 'done a *VF3tb*', apparently, resulting in a rather tired title), but its rendered artwork. So let's have a look at some of that instead. Lovely.





In the absence of screenshots, this *Tekken Tag* artwork kicks arse

Slug trails towards Pocket









Two of hardcore gaming's legendary titles in brand spanking new, 8bit format: *Metal Slug* (left group) and *Samurai Spirits* (right group)

Japan: While the format still does not have the thirdparty support enjoyed by its rivals from Nintendo and Bandai, SNK's Neo Geo Pocket does have its own big-name franchises, and three of the most famous and critically acclaimed are finally set to make the journey to the likeable colour handheld unit. *Fatal Fury: First Contact* and *Samurai Spirits* will be the two most recognisable of the trio, but it's *Metal Slug* that can't make its way into **Edge**'s office quickly enough.

While on the Neo Geo Pocket topic, it would appear that an error crept into the opening-weekend sales figure printed in **E**71. Expect an update on the system's performance in a feature here soon.





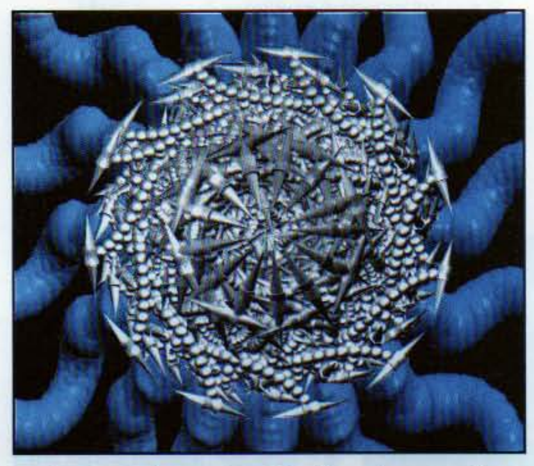
A dream cast?

UK: Fresh from splashing out £12 million (see **E**72) for a three-year sponsorship deal with Arsenal, Sega's marketing machine reconvened for the premiere of David Cronenberg's film 'eXistenZ' in the evening. There, at least, they got value for money with the film's male lead, Jude Law, gamely posing, spiral-decorated box in hand. Among the other celebs was John 'Nice' Thomson, of 'The Fast Show', who got to grips with *Sega Rally 2*. And these are all genuine, hardcore gamers. No, really, they are.





Tripping fantastic



It's still psychedelic, but now it's optimised for Pentium III as well

UK: 'You've come a long way, baby' seems to be an appropriate greeting for the latest iteration of this screensaver classic. Back in 1996, *Organic Art* opened up many minds to the wild universe of 3D computer graphics. It went on to slip-slide into the worlds of fashion and music, as well as kickstarting a multitude of neo-psychedelic clubbing experiences. And it was all running off the processing power of a mere 486.

Only now getting around to revamping the original, Computer Artworks has also started work on a bona fide sequel expected next year. But *Organic Art Deluxe* should keep old technohippies happy until then. Optimised for Pentium III, it has all the bells and whistles you'd expect: support for 3D acceleration and *DirectX*, environmental mapping, alpha blending and face mapping. For average Joes, the two main additions are more obvious, though: metallic surfaces and the control of elasticity. "Softness is this year's big thing," according to producer **Mark Atkinson**. And with settings ranging from stiff to gooey, things are only likely to get more organic.

Reality bites back

UK: Remember writing those convoluted stories at school? Three-quarters of the way through an incredibly unrealistic plot, you got bored and quickly ended with 'and I woke up and it was all a dream'. Well, the big players of the movie industry certainly do. Swiftly following Cronenberg's 'are we in a game or not?' angst of 'eXistenZ' comes the Hollywood version of reality confusion. And surprisingly, despite the fact that Keanu Reeves stars, 'The Matrix' is the far superior of the two. Sure, it's superficial and the ending stinks, but it's a polished spectacle. Think of an anime film made up of the best bits of 'Batman', 'Frankenstein', 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'The A Team' directed by John Woo, and you're getting close.

Set in a world controlled by machines where humans live in a virtual reality version of 1999, it follows a band of freedom fighters as they try to destroy the Matrix, the computer that runs the simulation. Plot over – let the action begin. Although the film's digital effects have gained critics' attention, the real stars of this show are the beautifully choreographed wire stunts. The other key is more obvious. In the words of the great white dude himself: "Guns, lots of guns." What's the point of being smart when dumb is so much fun?







'The Matrix' is on general release in the UK, and the 'Matrix' shades, as worn by Keanu, are apparently flying off the shelves. Honest

Straight to video

UK: If adventures courtesy of spiky-haired anime characters are your thing, roll up for the latest game-to-video crossover. Although *Toshinden* has never quite made it as a title worthy of *Tekken* or *Virtua Fighter* comparisons, advocates of its combat-with-weapons action should be well satisfied with the release of the first two volumes of *Battle Arena*. The plot is as flimsy as you would expect, with the shadowy Organisation setting out to destroy the Toshinden fighters with a man-machine assimilation of the scythe-wielding Chaos. Cue much katana-swinging and combo unleashing. What is scary, though, is the resemblance of certain parts to the old glory days of *Battle of the Planets*. Now *there's* a series you could make a great game out of.









BASEMENT JAXX
Remedy
(XL)

Sprouting out of the streets of deepest Camberwell, Basement Jaxx is living proof that dance music can still electrify both above and below the belt. From the exuberance of big charting 'Red Alert' to the rhythm of atmospheric tunes like 'Jazzalude', this is an album that rocks feet, groin and brain. But it's the synergy of the basic components that makes it work. R'n'B rubs shoulders with flamenco guitar and punk-garage beats, over which is sprinkled the pseudo-futuristic glaze of vocoder – and that's all in the first track. Summer is officially here.



SUPER FURRY ANIMALS
Guerilla
(Creation)

Throwing everything at the wall and seeing what sticks has always been the Furries' approach. When 'Guerilla' works, its distinctive guitars, synth squiggles and wigged-out Valley Boy harmonies are as charming as ever – even more so when the band's raft of daft new influences rummage their way to the fore. When it falters, though, it irritates like a little bastard. Happily, that's not very often.

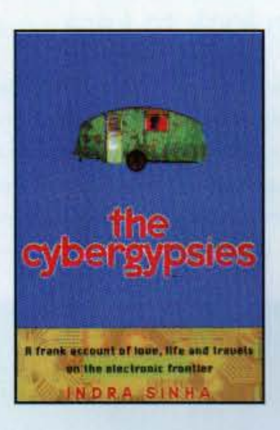


FRIDGE
EPH
(Go!Beat)

With three albums in fewer years, Fridge has confirmed its reputation as the *überkids* of the scene without a name. Best tagged as primitive electronica, don't let it put you off this rich mix of drum cuts, in-your-face melodies and looped leitmotifs. For 'EPH' is Fridge's most consistent collection thanks to the acquisition of a studio and the tight editing that times it out in under 42 minutes. Closing track 'Aphelion', in particular, is a fantastic example of the way instrumental music creates its own space in your head. The path to heaven starts here.



Author: **Erik Davis**
Publisher: **Serpent's Tail**
ISBN: **1 85242 645 4**



Author: **Indra Sinha**
Publisher: **Scribner**
ISBN: **0 684 81929 5**

THE WEIRD AND THE WONDERFUL

Electricity is the extension of the mind, according to the first prophet of the *Wired* age, Marshall McLuhan. Small wonder, then, that cyberspace is so screwed up. It's the place where human fantasies become extreme reality. Far from being the electronic utopia imagined by early pioneers, it's a global shopping mall meshed with a stamping ground for the fringes of society: everyone from Aryan supremacists to DIY atom bomb makers, hardcore pornographers and disaffected MI6 spooks. But, as these two different books show, a weirding atmosphere has underpinned the Net from the very beginning.

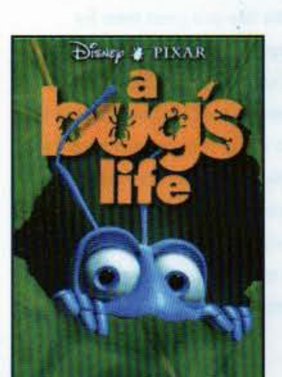
Erik Davis' *TechGnosis* is the more expansive of the two. A critique of 'magic and mysticism in the age of information', the central thesis is that the whole construct known as Science is supported by flights of fancy. This thinking is nothing new, though. Sociologists of science have long made the distinction between the context of discovery (what happened) and the justification of discovery (what you say happened). Great scientists from Isaac Newton to Richard Feynman have believed outlandish things. One member of the Royal Society still thinks fairies exist.

Where Davis' book scores is by delving into the birth of the Internet and discovering what a strange collection of old hippies and merry pranksters acted as its midwives. Davis uncovers many examples, and while few are as strange as the technopagan ritual held for the launch of VRML, it's clear that the logic behind the Net is somewhat twisted.

In contrast, *The Cybergypsies* is an autobiographical view of those early years and a reminder that people can get as lost in cyberspace as they can in real life. Back in 1984, Indra, or Bear, as he is known, had to write an advertising slogan for an online financial service. He didn't think much of the service, instead straying into other areas. Before long the loaned modem was in use five hours a night as Bear played out fantasies on *Shades*, one of the first UK MUDs. It wasn't until phone bills around the £600 mark started landing on the doormat that his family began to worry about this new gadget.

By that stage, however, Bear was addicted to this new world and the loose community that had developed; characters who travelled under names such as Lilith, Luna, Calypso and Morgan the le Fay Wizard. But the Net was rapidly becoming useful in other ways, too. As part of his work with Amnesty, Bear also helped set up newsgroups for the Kurds and victims of the Bhopal chemical disaster. And yet there remains something deeply tragic about *The Cybergypsies*. Brilliantly written, it inspires confidence in the way the Net can bring people together, while at the same time highlighting its isolating tendencies.

Bear was lucky. Both his marriage, health and bank balance survived the pressures of 15 years of surfing – just. This is a modern morality tale, serving notice that there has always been a ghost in the machine, and that not all spirits are friendly.



DVD: A Bug's Life
(Buena Vista/Disney) $35 (£22)

Perhaps fittingly, like last month's similarly themed 'Antz', this is currently only available as a Region 1 import, meaning you're unlikely to find it at your local DVD supplier.

Claiming to be the first direct digitally transferred DVD (resulting in minimal loss of quality), 'A Bug's Life' is as colourful and beautiful an example of this increasingly popular format as **Edge** has seen. You could argue that the facial animation in DreamWorks' effort is beyond anything 'A Bug's Life' can muster. You could even insist some of the texturing in the former is more accomplished. But by no means can you claim not to be able to determine which of the two has been rolling around in the dirt. Relatively speaking, of course.

Even with Disney's absurd decision to not include an anamorphic transfer (meaning owners of widescreen sets have to manually expand the picture to fill the frame, hence losing resolution), the detail level is simply staggering. At least the splendid Dolby Digital mix hasn't been overlooked. Which is more than can be said of the disappointingly little additional material available – 'Antz' offered a far more impressive package. True, as a typically Disney offering, the fictional tale is less cranial than that of 'Antz'. But that doesn't make it any less watchable.



VIEWPOINT

EXPRESS YOURSELF IN **EDGE** – WRITE TO: LETTERS, **EDGE**, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH, BA1 2BW (email: edge@futurenet.co.uk)

In your article 'Parental Advisory: Explicit Content' [**E**72] you addressed a question that is possibly the most important to this industry: are we warping children's minds? It can only be answered by looking at the past, at ourselves. Anyone alive today has, at some point, been part of a warped generation – the flappers of the '20s, the beats of the '50s, and the punks of the '80s all knew the lack of trust held by their parents' peers. My mother tried to stop me reading *2000AD* due to its 'horrific content'; my father banned me from getting Spike Milligan's novels due to their rather sordid nature. He is not naturally so prudish about anything, but where children are concerned his view is very traditional. Of course, a matter of weeks later I bought a novel by DeSade, blissfully unaware of its content. Books don't carry an age limit. I still read comics, I still love Spike Milligan – all my favourite things have been labelled evil and corrupt, from roleplaying games to punk music, and from Fat Freddy's Cat to moving pictures. And, yes, I am a little twisted, but in a perfectly healthy and normal way.

It is not about shielding our children from these images, it's about showing them the difference between right and wrong. Our perceptions of what is right and what is wrong are a combination of gut feeling and parental influence. When the parental influence is absent, the next best thing takes its place, be it granny or television. I thought I *was* Howling Mad Murdoch; let's hope the children look to Lara rather than Duke Nukem.

But that's not to say I hate these games. I love them, probably too much for my own good. I believe it may be time to stop limiting our young. Restricting their choices will only lead them to make blind judgments. Maybe it's time we let ourselves evolve, not just technologically but as a culture.

Bob Brown,
via email

'When parental influence is absent,

the next best thing takes its place, be it granny or television. I thought I *was* Howling Mad Murdoch; let's hope **the children look to Lara** rather than Duke Nukem'

To debate the life of the Dreamcast in relationship with the NGPS (topically) is absurd – and here's why. Say you go into an arcade and play a game – let's take *House of the Dead 2*. Unless you have the eyes of Clint Eastwood and a trigger action as happy as a private investigator drinking whiskey while high on speed, you will spend £10. You play *Soul Calibur* with a friend and between you the machine eats another £5-10. God forbid you want a level 99 character on *Gauntlet Legends* (there is some imperceptible quality about the game that makes you pay £75 or so for the required 150 credits to achieve it). I trust arcade managers are very pleased with these token gobblers, but they'll be replaced soon enough.

My point is this: you can bring these games (first two on DC, third on N64 or PS) into your home to play with friends at any hour of the day for a moderate price.

For the expense of one of those steely cappuccino makers that adorn designer kitchens, you too can play a conversion which all but the really rather pedantic connoisseurs find very comparable to the original.



Buying a console is akin to pumping cash into coin-ops like *HOTD2*, says Leo Coulson

So you buy your DC. 'Oh, no!' you exclaim. 'My investment is useless in a year or so's time.' 'Okay,' some defend, 'but you'll still have your classics that you'll play long after…' 'But how about new games? Software support?!' And guess what, you're right – development has moved on to the next incarnation of consoles. Your DC may have lasted you a year-and-a-half before being superseded by the NGPS or whatnot – and you may have spent £3 a day paying for the pleasure (many people spend more than that on a pack of cigs).

Other scenario: DC still does well but NGPS has loads of games you want. Bite the bullet and buy the second console as well. Maybe the cost of upgrading for £200 is an issue of concern to the 13-year-old scraping his pennies together, but I imagine a large number of **Edge**'s readership are older, and I am surprised by this attitude.

But this probably isn't the issue – I think it's the mistaken view many take when buying a console. You're not buying bonds, it's not an investment. You buy the right to participate in a period of an industry going at an unstoppably fast pace in technical terms (most PC buyers realise this from the start). It's like buying a slice of pie – it looks great, tastes good, but will be gone. You do get something – entertainment and memories (who will forget the original *Super Mario Bros*?) – but this pie keeps getting better and you have to buy more if you want to keep eating. Personally, I love it.

We live in a great time for computer gaming – let's embrace and support it, not bicker at the inevitable teething problems in the birth of the next entertainment era.

My take-home message is: buy a DC now and worry about the next generation when it's born. And if you must justify the expense, call it interim spending well made.

Leo Coulson,
via email

I found the 'Painting by Numbers' article [E72] very interesting, but thought Jez San's comments regarding Japanese publishers ("*Final Fantasy X* will just be *Final Fantasy IX* with more polygons. Haven't these guys got any imagination?") were rather crass.

A lack of imagination is not something SquareSoft can be accused of regarding the *FF* series. *FFVII*, while not exactly lacking in the polygon department, relies on a powerful narrative rather than unnecessarily flashy visuals to capture the gamer's attention. Indeed, referring to your 'Parent Advisory' article, I was one of those players moved to tears upon Aeris' unexpected demise. This sort of emotional response is evoked by story telling, not polygon shifting. I don't think SquareSoft is likely to sacrifice narrative for technical excellence in future releases, as suggested by San. His comments would be better directed at other softcos who definitely are guilty of a lack of imagination.

This may seem like an over-reaction to what is basically one quote out of six pages, but in an age when framerates and polys/sec are everything, Square masterfully demonstrated that narrative and emotional content can be more powerful than technical excellence.

Steve Robinson,
via email

P.S. I disagree with Oliver Pawley's comments regarding flat-shaded polys. Moving away from mono, vector-based graphics was always a bad idea in my opinion.

Not every game has to be an epic, as stated in the Prescreen column of **E**71. I think size is a vastly overrated quality in videogames. Also, I'd like to think that if big and epic games were the exceptions and not the rules, the videogame industry would be a healthier one.

Smaller games would mean a shorter development time and the possibility of less expensive titles. The high price of new releases encourages software piracy and somewhat excludes videogames from mainstream consumption. Producing games would be a less risky business and therefore we could expect more experimental and original game concepts.

Another, perhaps even more important, aspect that **Edge** touched upon is the simple fact that most people have a limited amount of spare time left for playing videogames. Many people with little or no experience of videogames want to be able to occasionally pick up a game for a short period of entertainment. But most games cannot really be played this way – titles like *Zelda* and *Tomb Raider II* would take several years to complete! As anything but an inexperienced gameplayer, I have not completed those games. I think that they're good, but not good enough to invest the time necessary to complete them.

A small game, in the sense of something with a small gameworld or something that can be completed in a short space of time, is not necessarily a game short on playability. (But even if it is, that's all right if the game is accordingly cheap.) Often size is just a means to overcome bad design: to increase the challenge, developers put in more, tougher enemies – and yet another level. Large game worlds often demand a lot of work on the graphical representation during development. If some of this work could instead be done to increase the complexity of a smaller game world, we could have less linear games with lastability despite their small size.

Anders Hansson,
via email

'I think size is a **vastly overrated quality** in videogames. Also, I'd like to think that if big and epic games were **the exceptions and not the rules,** the videogame industry would be a healthier one'

You seemed to deal a little unfairly with Oliver Pawley's letter in **E**72, if not missed his salient point. As we enter the next era of gaming, and hardware technology becomes less of a limiting factor in terms of game design and appearance, the medium is about to come of age. The transitional phase we are entering is one from technology-led game to entertainment art. Finally the medium will be able to say something constructive and deliver challenging questions to gamers as an undertone to the play. Pawley seems to have been asserting that style rather than realism is going to become the new visual frontier once the technological challenge of producing that realism has been sufficiently met. This concept plays no small part in such a revolution (although I will avoid the issue of the resurgence of the flat-shaded polygon). The process of transforming games from toys into an art form has already begun, and the possibilities far exceed those of its celluloid counterpart. Cinema itself took time to develop from a technological curiosity into a common language of expression and no doubt the road to be travelled by games is just as arduous. There will still be games as pure entertainment, just as there are action movies for the less visceral among us, and it is these that will most likely appear first. If we don't shun these early (and no doubt poor) attempts, then exciting times lie ahead for the industry, consumer and critics alike.

Ben Gonshaw,
via email

'Technology-led game to entertainment art' – an interesting way of presenting the cycle. You missed out 'proven formulae' as you concluded it, though.

In response to 0day Pir8's comments in **E**71, you don't have to wait (for other people to happily work for you). Maybe you could buy your games from a Japanese shop. It shouldn't take more than a few days to arrive. Of course, you'll have to pay someone to ship the game – just like the publisher. Maybe you could become a professional NTSC-to-PAL converter – it's so easy and rewarding: you buy the rights to the game and convert it overnight, then distribute it. Oh, and why should you wait for the PS2 to be released? You can steal one from Sony's labs.

Pal,
via email

The world's most prestigious car manufacturer. The best racing game producer ever. Together.

The result? *Ferrari F355 Challenge*. Next month Edge talks to Sega's Yu Suzuki about his Naomi-powered *coup de grâce*.

ISSUE SEVENTY-FOUR

ON SALE JULY 13


GAME OVER
TETRIS
NEXT
4
04
05
LINES
LEFT
AHEAD
HIGH SCORE
10000
ROUND 1
CREDITS 9
SCORE 423
LINES 1
SCORE 551
LINES 2

